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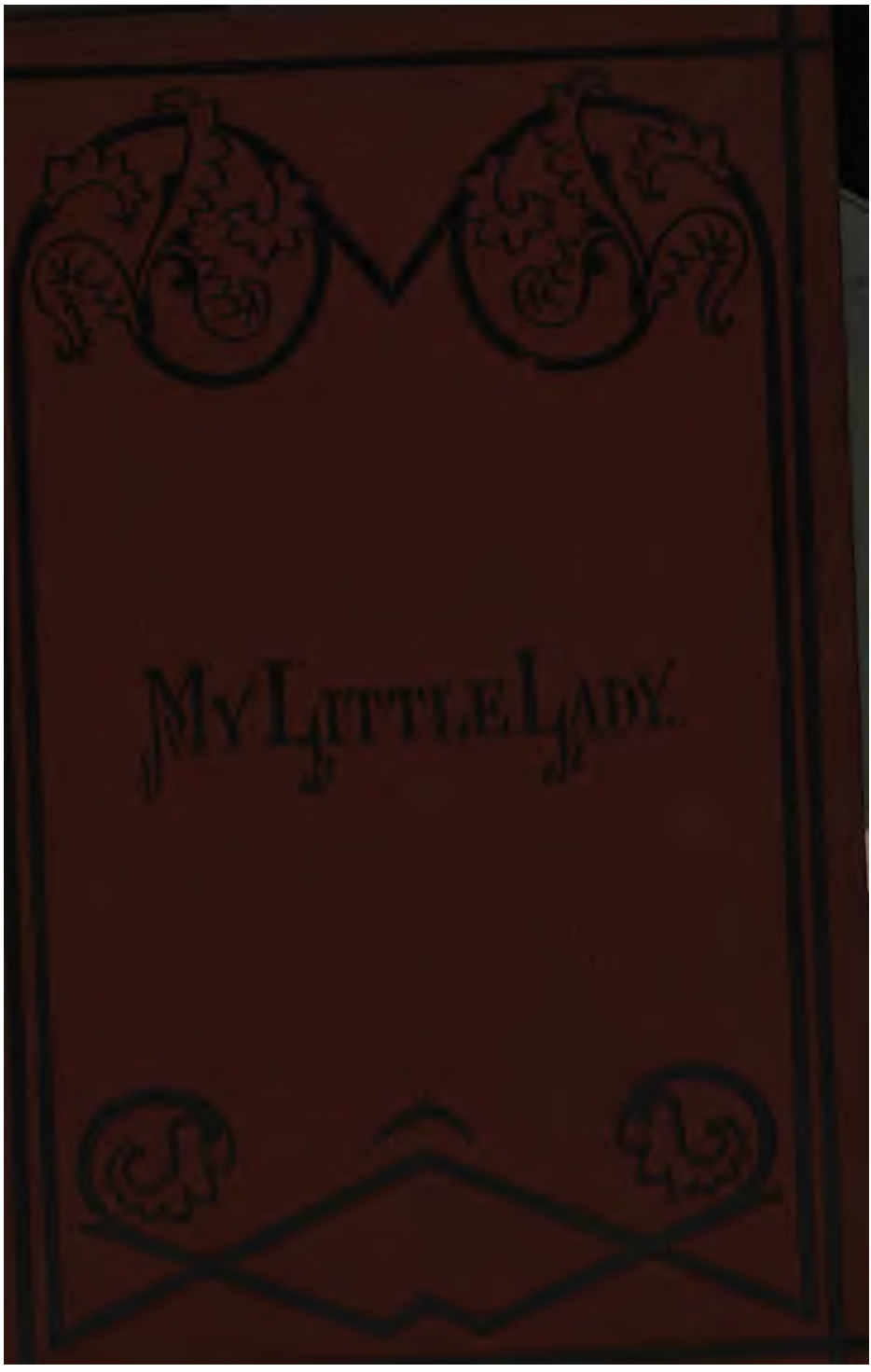
My Little Lady.

MY LITTLE LADY.

VOL. II.

MY LITTLE LADY.

Thy sinless progress, through a world
By sorrow darken'd and by care disturbed,
Apt likeness bears to hers through gather'd clouds
Moving untouch'd in silver purity.

WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1871.

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LONDON:
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL,
BLENHEIM HOUSE.

MY LITTLE LADY.

PART II.

(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER III.

MADELON'S VIGIL.

FIVE minutes after Madame Lavaux had left the room, Madelon, just awakened from her sound sleep, came creeping gently in. It was almost dark by this time, for it was late in the afternoon, and the Venetian shutters were still closed that had kept out the heat and glare all day; but now she threw them back, and let in the tepid evening breeze, and the faded light of the dying day; carriages and carts were rattling in the street below, shrill voices came from the opposite houses where lights were appearing here and there; high up in the

serene gray-blue sky a few reddened clouds had caught the last gleams of the setting sun.

"Madelon," said M. Linders, roused by the noise she had made in opening the shutters.

A sudden throb of joy came over her as she heard his voice again, and she went swiftly and stood by his bedside.

"Are you better, papa?" she said, putting her two little cool hands into one of his, hot with fever.

"We are alone, are we not?" he answered, looking feebly round. "Come and sit up here by me. Can you jump up? That is right," as she climbed up and nestled close to him, her feet tucked under the sheet; "here, *petite*, let me put my arm round you."

He raised himself with an effort, and passed his arm round her, so that she could lay her head on his shoulder; and then in answer to her question,

"No, I am not better," he said, "and I do not suppose I ever shall be better now. But never mind that," as she raised her head suddenly, and looked at him with wide, frightened eyes, "let us talk a little, Madelon. We have always been happy together, have we not, my child?"

"Ah! yes, papa."

"And later, when you are grown into a woman—as you will be, you know, by-and-by—and you think of the years when you were a little girl, you will like to recall them, will you not, Madelon? You will remember that they were happy?"

"Yes, papa, I have been happy, ah, so happy!" says Madelon, half crying, and nestling closer to him; "but why do you talk so? What do you mean?"

"You will think of all our travels together, what pretty places we have visited, all the *fête* days we have spent; and you

will remember that, whatever else I may or may not have done, I have always tried to make you happy, and to be a good papa to my little one. Promise me that, Madelon."

"I promise it, papa," she said. "How could I forget? Why should I not remember? Why do you talk to me in this way, papa? Are you very ill?"

"Very ill," he replied, holding her tighter to him, "so ill that all those happy days are come to an end for me, and for you, too, *ma petite;* we shall never go about again together. You—you—" his voice broke with a sort of groan, but he went on again directly, "I wonder what my little Madelon will be like when she grows into a great girl? I should have liked to have seen you, my little one. I wonder if you will be tall—I daresay you will—for your mother was tall, and your face is very like hers."

"Am I like her, papa?"

"Very," he said, stroking her wavy hair with his feeble fingers; "your eyes—yes, you have eyes that resemble hers exactly, and sometimes I have thought that when you grew up it would be almost like seeing her over again—for you know I did love her," he added in a lower voice, turning his head restlessly on the pillow, "though they said I did not. I never meant her to die alone; they might have known that. I wish— Bah! I am forgetting——"

"What did you say, papa?"

"Nothing," he answered, "I think I was forgetting where I was. How dark it is growing! you must light the candles soon. I must look at you again, you know, I want to see your eyes, and smile, and pretty hair once more. And you, my little one, you will not forget my face? Don't cry, don't cry," he said, with a sudden pain in his voice, "I cannot bear it. I have never

made you cry before, have I, my child?"

"Never, never!" she said, stifling her tears desperately.

"You must think of me sometimes when you are grown up," he went on in his feeble voice, harping still on the same subject. "You will have no money, my poor little one—if it had not been for that devil Legros —but it is too late to think of that now. Well, I think you will have beauty, and that will go far even if you have no *dot*, and I should like you to marry well. But when you have a husband, and are rich, perhaps, you must still think sometimes of the days when you were a little girl, and had a papa who loved no one in the world so much as his little Madelon."

"Papa, I want no money, nor husband, nor anything else," cried Madelon, in a burst of tears, and throwing both her arms round his neck. "I want nobody but you, and I

love you, and always shall love you better than anyone else in the world. Papa, are you going to die and leave me?"

"So it seems," he said bitterly. "It is not my choice, Madelon, but one cannot arrange these little matters for oneself, you see. Now listen, my child; I am not going to leave you quite alone. I have a sister, who is your Aunt Thérèse; I have never spoken to you about her before, for she became a nun, and we have not always been very good friends, but I think she will give you a home. She is the Superior of a convent near Liége, and that English gentleman —the doctor, you know—will take you to her; do you understand?"

"Yes, papa."

"Well, you must stay with her for the present. It is not just what I could have wished for you, *ma petite*, but I have no choice, as it happens, and if ever you are dull

or unhappy there, you will not blame me, or think I was unkind in sending you, will you, my child? for indeed I could not help it, and you will be a good little girl, I know. By-and-by, as I said, perhaps you will marry—I cannot arrange all these matters beforehand. I used to think sometimes that perhaps you might have come out on the stage a few years hence. Would you have liked that, Madelon?"

"Yes—no—oh, I don't know, papa—I want you—I want you!"

"Yes—you will want me, *pauvre petite.* Good Heavens! that a child so small, so young should be left without me to take care of her! Bah, I must not think of it. Madelon, there is one thing more you must promise me—never to become a nun."

"A nun, papa?"

"Yes, a nun," he repeated in his feeble vehement way, "a nun like your Aunt

Thérèse. Do you know what it means? To grow pious, and narrow-minded and sour, to live for ever shut up between four walls from which there is no escape, to think yourself better than all the world. Madelon, promise me never to become a nun; if I thought that were the future in store for you—promise me, I say."

"I promise, papa," she said quite solemnly, putting her hands together with a quaint little gesture; "indeed I should not like it at all."

"If I could only foresee—if I could only arrange," he said piteously. "God knows I have done what I think is best for you, my child, and yet—who knows what may come of it? Madelon," he went on in a faint, pleading, broken voice, "you will not let them make you think ill of me, and blame and despise me when I am dead? They will try perhaps, but you must always

love me, my darling, as you do now; it must not be all in vain—all that I have been striving for—ah, don't cry!—there—we won't talk any more now—another time."

There was a minute's silence in the darkening twilight; Madelon's face was hidden in her father's shoulder, as he lay there with his arm still round her and his eyes closed, faint and exhausted. All of a sudden he roused himself with a start.

"Ah, I am dying!" he cried with a hoarse voice, "and it is all dark! Light the candles, Madelon—light them quickly, I must see you once more before I die!"

Startled, awe-struck, only half realizing the meaning of his words, Madelon slid off the bed and prepared to obey. At that moment there came a tremendous knocking at the door of the room, and a voice half chanting half shouting,

"Are you here, my friend? Are you within to-night? Can one enter? Open quick; it is I, it is your friend! Are you ready for your little revenge? I am ready, for my part; I will give it you—yes, with pleasure—yes, with an open heart!"

"It is Legros!" cried M. Linders from his bed, in a sudden spasm of rage, "it is that villain, that *misérable*! Yes, yes, come in; Madelon, light the candles quickly; where are the cards? Ah—I will have my revenge yet!"

The door burst open, and Legros entered, just as Madelon had succeeded in lighting the candles. He stopped short in his uproarious entrance, suddenly sobered by the appearance of M. Linders, as he lay propped up with pillows, his white face and bandaged head, and eyes gleaming with fever and rage.

"Papa is very ill," says Madelon. "Mon-

sieur, do not stay to-night, I beg of you!"

"What are you saying, Madelon?" cried her father; "I forbid you to say that again; bring me the cards. Legros, I am ready for you; ah, there is then one more chance in life!"

"You are not fit to play, Monsieur," said the young man, stepping back, "I will come again to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" answered M. Linders with a sort of laugh, "have you then so many to-morrows that you can talk of them so recklessly? Well, then I will tell you—I have not one—not one; but I have to-night, and that I will not lose. Ah! you think to cheat me in that way? you will put me off till to-morrow? you will say then—ah, this M. Linders can never have his revenge now, he is quiet enough, I can keep his money in my pocket? You shall not say that, Monsieur; Madelon, bring the cards, and the

lights, close to me, here, I cannot see well, it is so dark."

He seized the cards, and began to deal them out on the coverlet with his trembling hands. Madelon placed a small table at his side, put one candle on it, and with the other in her hand stood close to his pillow white and motionless. Legros slowly and reluctantly drew a chair to the bedside, and sat down opposite. There was a moment's pause, whilst M. Linders shifted and sorted his cards, and then, "A vous, Monsieur," he cried, with a sort of fierce impatience ; but at the same instant his hold relaxed, the cards tumbled all in a heap on to the floor, his head fell back. Madelon screamed and started forward, upsetting the table and the candle ; Legros sprang up. It was at that moment that the door opened, and Graham, followed by a Sœur de Charité entered the room.

Never, to the last day of his life, one may fancy, would Graham forget the little scene before him, which, indeed, always returned to his memory with an impression as vivid as that made upon him now—the overturned table, the scattered cards, Madelon in her white frock, her pale scared face, her wavy hair, her great brown eyes illuminated by the candle she still held, the terrified Legros, the ghastly look of the dying man —he saw it all at a glance, as he entered the room he had left so dim and silent but half an hour ago. It was to Legros he first addressed himself, in a tone of strong indignation.

"Monsieur," he said, "you can have no business to transact with a dying man, and your presence is not desired here. Might I request you to leave me alone with my patient?"

"On my honour, Monsieur," cries the

other, pale and stammering, "it was no doing of mine—he would have it so."

Graham, very likely, did not hear what he said; he was already at M. Linders' side. He raised his head, he felt his pulse and heart.

"It is nearly over," he said to the Sœur de Charité, "will you take the little girl into the next room?" And Madelon, frightened and trembling, offered no resistance as the Sœur took her by the hand and led her away.

It was as Graham said; all was nearly over. The feeble life, that with careful tending and cherishing might have flickered and lingered on yet a little longer, was all but quenched in this last supreme passion and effort. M. Linders never spoke again, and died in less than two hours, quietly at last, as men do for the most part die, it is said.

"That poor child!" said Graham, "who will tell her?"

"I will," said the brave, cheery little Sœur Angélique, and went.

* * * * * *

It was nearly midnight when the sad little bustle that had been going on in the chamber of death was hushed at last, and the Sœur de Charité prepared to depart. She had offered indeed to stay all night, but when Graham assured her that there was no occasion for anyone to remain, as his room was just opposite, and he should be on the watch to see that all was quiet, she owned she should be glad to go, as there was much illness about, and her services might be required elsewhere. She stood talking to Graham for a few moments before leaving.

"That poor little one," she said, "I

should like to have one look at her, just to see that she is quiet; I don't think she half understood, or took in, what I said to her."

"Madame Lavaux told me she was in bed," Graham answered, "but we will see if she is asleep. Poor child, she will understand it all soon enough."

He opened the door gently between the two rooms, and they looked in. All was dark and silent, but they could just distinguish a little head laid on the white pillow, and could hear Madelon's soft, regular breathing.

"That is all right," said Graham, "we will not go in and disturb her; she will sleep till the morning, I daresay, for she was up almost all last night." He closed the door again as he spoke, and so they left her.

It was true that Madelon was asleep, but she was not exactly in bed. When the Sis-

ter had come in to tell her of her father's death, she had found her seated on the ground close to the door, with her hands clasped round her knees, her head leaning against the doorway; some one had brought in some supper on a tray, but it stood on the table untouched, though she had eaten nothing since the morning. She did not move when Sœur Angélique came in, but she looked up with an expression of dumb, helpless misery that went to the Sister's heart; she sat down beside her on the floor, put her arm round her, and told her the sad news in her gentle, quiet tones, which had acquired a ring of sympathy and tenderness in a thousand mournful scenes of sorrow and despair; but, as she had said to Horace, she hardly knew whether the child understood her, or took in what she was saying. Madelon did not speak nor cry; she only sat gazing at the little Sister with a look of per-

plexed terror dilating her brown eyes, that never changed as Sœur Angélique went on with her pious, gentle maxims and consolations, which fell blankly enough we may be sure on our small Madelon's bewildered mind; and presently, hearing herself called, and seeing indeed that she was making no impression with her kind little speeches, the Sister rose to go, saying as she did so, "you will go to bed now, *chère petite*, will you not?" and then thinking that a familiar face and voice might perhaps have a kindlier influence than her own just then, she added, "and I will ask Madame Lavaux to come to you."

"No, no," cried Madelon, suddenly rousing, and starting up at these last words. She had comprehended what the Sister had told her well enough so far as words went, but she was too stunned and confused to take in their full meaning; and in truth her presence there at all had only been another unfamiliar

element in this bewildering whirl of events, imparting an additional sense of unreality. But when she mentioned Madame Lavaux, the name linked itself at once with recent memories and emotions, and its accustomed association with her every-day life made it a rallying point, as it were, for her scattered ideas. Madame Lavaux had been cross and unkind to her the night before; Madame had buoyed her up with false hopes of her father's recovery only that morning; Madelon did not want her, would not see her. She stood still for a few minutes after the Sœur de Charité had left the room, all her sorrows and doubts and certainties resolved for the moment into a dull, unreasoning dread of seeing Madame Lavaux come in; and then, suddenly fancying she heard footsteps approaching the door, she hastily blew out her candle, and all dressed as she was, crept under the coverlet of the bed. She

would pretend to be asleep, she thought, and then no one would disturb her. The footsteps passed on, but presently the door did open, and some one looked in; it was Madame Lavaux, who, seeing that Madelon made no sign, concluded that she was asleep, and went away softly, with a kind pity in her heart for the desolate child. As for Madelon, the pretence of slumber soon passed into reality, for after lying awake for a while listening to the low voices and rustling movements in the next room, fatigue and her own enforced tranquillity overcame her, and she fell sound asleep.

It must have been long past midnight when she awoke again with a sudden feeling of fright and strangeness, for which she could not account, but which made her spring off the bed and listen if she could hear any one moving. All was very still; not a

sound came from the adjoining apartment; her own room was quite dark, for the windows and outside shutters were closed. Madelon felt scared, lonely, desolate, without knowing why, and then all at once she remembered the reason; all that the Sister had said came back with fresh meaning and distinctness to her senses restored by sleep, and sitting down on the floor just where she was, she began to cry with a low moaning sobbing sound, as a child cries when it is sorry and not naughty.

No one heard her, no one came near her; she was all alone, and in a few minutes she stopped crying, half frightened at her own voice in the silence and darkness. And then she began to wonder if her father were still in the next room, or whether they had taken him away anywhere; if not, he was all alone in there, as she was in here; it would be some comfort to be with him, she thought.

Madelon knew that he was dead, but death was an unfamiliar experience with her, and she could not perhaps clearly separate this hour from all other hours when she had been hurt, or sorrowful, or frightened, and had run to her father to be comforted.

She got up, and opening the door, stole softly into the other room; it was not quite so dark in there, the windows and Venetian shutters were wide open, and a lamp in the street below gave an uncertain light, by which she could just distinguish the gleam of the mirror, the table in the centre of the room, and the bed, where the outline of a silent form was vaguely defined under the white covering sheet. Madelon had had some half-formed idea of getting on to the bed, and nestling down by her father, as she had done only the evening before, when he had put his arm round her, and they had talked together; but now a chill dread crept

over her, a sense of change, of separation; she had not even the courage to raise the sheet and look upon his face; she stood gazing for a moment, afraid to go back into the darkness of her own room; and then with a sudden movement, as though urged by some terror, she turned quickly away, and went swiftly to the open window. She looked down into the narrow, dark street, dimly illuminated by an occasional lamp, she looked up to the starlit space of sky visible above the house roofs and chimneys, and neither above nor below did she find any comfort; for a sudden awful realization of death had come to her in the darkness and silence, almost too keen and terrible for our poor little Madelon to bear—each realization too a fresh shock, as with an instinctive shrinking from this new consciousness of an intolerable weight, her mind slipped away into some more familiar channel, only to be brought

rudely back to this fact, so unfamiliar, and yet the only one for her now, in this sudden shattering of all her small world of hopes and joys and affections. And is it not, in truth, terrible, this *strength* of facts, when we are, as it were, brought face to face with them, and held there till we recognize them? No means of evasion, no hope of appeal from what is, in its very nature, fixed, unalterable, irrevocable; the sin is committed, the loved one gone, the friendship broken and dead, and for us remains the realization in remorse, and heart-breaking, and despair.

Which of us is strong enough to wrestle with facts such as these? which one of us can look them long in the face and live? In the desperate recoil, some of us find ourselves recklessly striving to forget and ignore them, and some find a surer refuge in facts that are stronger still than they; but to one and all, in kindly compassion to human

weakness, each new emotion, each passing interest and trivial incident, combines to interpose a barrier between us and the terrible moment that overwhelmed us; and time, which in later years seems to drag out the slow hours and days into long ages of dreary grief, can deal swiftly and mercifully with a little child. Hardly had Madelon grasped the true measure of her grievous loss, or tasted its full bitterness, when the reaction came with a great burst of tears, and crouching down in the corner by the window where she had spent so many hours of the previous day, she sobbed away half the terror and awe that were oppressing her poor little heart. Presently she began to grow sorry for herself in a vague, half conscious sort of way—poor little Madelon, sitting there all alone crying, no one to help her, no one to comfort her—then the sobs came at longer and longer intervals as she gradually lost

consciousness of where she was, or why she was there; and with the tears still wet on her cheeks, she was nearly asleep again, when she was roused by some one bringing a light into the room; it was Graham, who had come to fetch something he had left on the table, and to see that all was quiet.

Madelon was too much accustomed to late expectant vigils to be startled; and, indeed, in her drowsy state, her first impression was only the familiar one of a welcome arrival. "Me voici, papa!" she cried, jumping up promptly; and then she saw the young man coming towards her, and with a suddenly revived consciousness of the still, white-sheeted form on the bed, she sank down on her low seat again, the sensation of blank misery all revived.

Graham, on his side, was not a little surprised at the small figure that had started up to meet him; he had fancied her in bed

hours ago. He came up to where she was sitting, a most sad disconsolate little Madelon, all huddled together, her hands clasped round her knees, her eyes shining through a short wavy tangle of brown hair, all rough and disordered.

"Don't you think you would be better in bed?" says Horace, in his kind cheery voice.

"No," she answered abruptly; she was so miserable, so sore at heart with the sudden disappointment, poor child, and Graham had been the cause of it.

"But I am afraid you will be ill to-morrow if you sit there all night," said Graham; "do you know what time it is?"

"No," she said again; and then, as he came a step nearer, she gave a stamp on the floor and turned her back on him. "Ah, do leave me alone!" she cried, in a miserable little broken voice, covering her face with her hands.

Graham saw that she was utterly wretched and worn out. He could guess pretty well how it had all happened, and reproached himself for not having foreseen and provided against the chance of her waking up and finding herself alone; and now he hardly knew what to do—to speak to her, or to urge her any more just then, would only make matters worse. At last he said quietly,

"I have some writing to do, and I am going to bring it in here; you will not mind that, I daresay?"

No answer; Horace left the room, but in a moment he returned, sat down at the table and began to write.

A stillness which the rapid scratching of the pen upon the paper, and the vague, ceaseless hum of the great city coming through the open window, only seemed to render apparent; occasionally the clang of

a church clock, the sudden rattle of wheels rising like hollow thunder and dying away into remote distance, a far-off cry, and then a silence more profound by contrast. Madelon, sitting in her dark corner, began to recover herself; in truth, it was the greatest possible relief to have Graham in the room with her, bringing light and the warm sense of a living presence into the chill unnatural silence and darkness of death; and presently she began to awake to a half penitent consciousness that she had been cross, rude, not at all *raisonnable* in fact; little by little she shifted her position, and at length turned quite round to look at M. le Docteur.

Monsieur le Docteur was not looking at her, nor thinking of her apparently, for he never raised his eyes from his writing; the candle light shone on his rough brown hair, on his pleasant, clever face, with keen pro-

file, well defined against a shadowy background. Madelon sat watching him as though fascinated; there was something in the absorbed attention he was giving to his writing, which subdued and attracted her far more than any words he could have spoken to her, or notice he could have taken of her just then. He had apparently forgotten her, this kind Monsieur le Docteur, who had evidently more important things to think about than her, and her pettish little speeches; or she had perhaps made him angry, and he would not take any more notice of her at all? There was a certain amount of probability in this last idea to the self-convicted little Madelon, that urged her to some sort of action; she sat still for a few moments longer, then got up and stole softly across the room to where Graham was sitting.

"I did not mean to be cross, Monsieur,"

she said in her little trembling voice, standing with her hands clasped behind her back, and tears in her eyes. Perhaps Graham *had* forgotten her for the moment, for he gave a little start as he looked round.

"I am sure you did not," he said quite earnestly, as he laid down his pen, "but you are so tired to-night, and unhappy too; are you not?"

"Ah, yes," she answered, with a little sob, "I am very unhappy!"

He put his arm round her, as she stood beside him, and took one of her little hands in his; he was so sorry for the poor little girl, and yet he hardly knew what to say to console her. She gave two or three more little sobs, rubbing her eyes with her other hand to keep back the tears; presently she looked up into his face and said,

"Do you really think I had better go to bed?"

"Indeed I do," replied Horace, much relieved by the practical turn her thoughts were taking; "I am really afraid you will be ill to-morrow if you do not, and you know I must take care of you now."

"I thought papa was all alone in here, and I was alone too," said Madelon "it was so dark and lonely in my room."

"Well," said Horace, "I am going to stay in here for a little while, and presently I will open your door, and then it will be almost as if you were in the same room; won't that do?"

"Yes, thank you," said Madelon, who indeed was so tired that she could hardly speak. Graham lighted a candle for her, and opened the door leading into the inner room; she paused a moment as she took the light, and gazed up into the kind face looking down upon her; then she put her hand into his, and saying "Good-

night, Monsieur," went into her own room. Graham closed the door and returned to his writing. That was all that passed between them, but from that time Madelon's feeling for Horace Graham approached adoration.

CHAPTER IV.

MADELON'S PROMISE.

A WEEK later, and Madelon was again, as on the day of her father's death, standing at a long open window, looking out on the fading glories of another evening sky. But instead of the narrow Paris street, with its noisy rattle of vehicles, and high white houses limiting the view of earth and heaven, before her lay the small garden of a Liége hotel, and beyond, the steep slope of a hill, where, mingled with trees, roof rose above roof, to where two churches crowning the ridge, showed their grey masses outlined against the clear pale blue.

Madelon had left Paris with Horace Graham the day before, and they had arrived at Liége that afternoon. The young doctor, bent on fulfilling the promise he had made to M. Linders, had altered all his plans, remaining in Paris till his little charge's affairs were settled, and then bringing her to Liége, with the intention of leaving her in her aunt's hands, and of then proceeding to Switzerland for the accomplishment of as much of his proposed tour as should still be practicable. He willingly forfeited these days out of his brief holiday, for he had come to regard the child so unexpectedly thrown upon his care, with a very sincere interest, an affection not unmixed with wonder. Madelon was not at all like any other little girl he had ever had anything to do with, or rather—for his experience on this point was limited—unlike his preconceived notions of little girls in general. We, who know

what Madelon's education had been, cannot feel surprised at her total ignorance of all sorts of elementary matters, her perfect unconsciousness of the most ordinary modes of thought current in the world, and of the most generally received standards of right and wrong, combined with a detailed experience in a variety of subjects with which children in general have no acquaintance. But for Graham, there was much that could only be matter for conjecture, much that he could only learn from inference, and to him there was something at once strange and pitiable in the simplicity with which she talked to him of her past life, dwelling on little episodes that only served to exhibit more and more clearly the real character of M. Linders and his associates. Not for the world would he have touched the child's innocent faith, or revealed to our simple Madelon that her father was not the per-

fection she dreamed him ; but he began to understand better the meaning of M. Linders' last words in his letter to his sister, and they gained a pathetic significance and force as he learnt to appreciate the affection that had subsisted between the father and child, and foresaw too plainly that the time must come when some rude shock would shatter all Madelon's early beliefs, and desecrate, as it were, her tenderest memories. There was something so sad in this certain retribution that must fall upon her innocent head, as the child of such a father, something so touching in her anomalous position, left all friendless and lonely in the midst of such a hard, relentless world, that Horace felt all his tenderest feelings stirred with compassion, and he could have wished to have shielded her for ever from what, he could not but fear, too surely awaited her sooner or later.

What he could do, he did, and it was more than he thought. Madelon's sudden devotion to him, of which indeed he knew and suspected nothing, was of infinite service to her in the first bitterness of her grief, by giving a new current to her ideas, whilst it did away with the sense of lonely desolation that had nearly overpowered her in that first dark hour. In her ardent little nature there was a necessity for loving, even stronger perhaps than for being loved, a certain enthusiasm, a capacity for devotion that had opportunely found an object in the time of extreme need. For a short hour it had seemed to her as if life itself had come to an end with her father's death; the darkness and vagueness of the future had crushed her down, all the more that she had scarcely comprehended what was the weight that so oppressed her—and then a moment had changed it all; a kind word spoken, a kind

face looking down upon her, a friendly hand stretched out, and the vague terrors had vanished. From that time Horace Graham's presence was bliss to our Madelon; when she was unhappy, she dried her tears if he consoled her; if he was out, she sat listening for his returning footstep; if he was busy, she was content to remain for hours with her book on her knee, her chin propped on her hands, her wistful eyes following his every movement. Monsieur Horace, as it pleased Madelon to call him, knew nothing of all this, we may be sure; but he was very good and tender to the little girl, and did all he could to cheer and console her in the sudden overpowering fits of grief that came upon her from time to time. Finding that she liked to talk of the past, he encouraged her to do so, being anxious, indeed, to learn all he could of her former life, and to ascertain if, after all, there were indeed no

friends to whom he could apply, in the event of his mission to her Aunt Thérèse proving, from any cause, unsuccessful. But as before, on this point he obtained no sort of satisfaction. Madelon never got much beyond the Florence artists, and her German countess, and Russian princess. M. Linders, it was evident, had had no friends beyond the acquaintance he had made at the different places at which he had been wont to tarry from time to time; and these, for the most part, Graham inferred to have been of so doubtful a character that he could only rejoice for Madelon's sake that all further chance of connection was broken off. Madelon dwelt at great length on their last winter at Florence; she loved Italy, she said, she liked it better than France or Belgium, and Florence was such a beautiful place; had Monsieur Horace ever been there? There were such splendid churches, and

palaces and galleries, with such grand pictures and statues; the American used to take her to see them. Papa had several friends there who knew a great deal about pictures, who were artists indeed; she used to go to their studios sometimes, and she liked hearing them talk. And then there were the fêtes and processions, and the country people in such gay dresses, and all with such a blue sky and such bright sunshine; and then the Sundays! very often she and papa would go out into the country to some inn where they would breakfast and dine; ah! it had been so pleasant. "I shall never be so happy again," sighs Madelon.

The warm, glowing, picturesque Italian life had, as we know, forcibly seized her imagination, her eyes shone with delight as she recalled it, and, almost involuntarily in describing it, she made use of the soft

words and phrases of the Italian tongue, which with the ready talent she possessed for languages, she had caught up, and spoke fluently.

"Where did you go when you left Florence?" asked Graham.

"We came north across the Alps and through Switzerland to Baden, and then we stayed a little while at Homburg, and then we were at Wiesbaden for six weeks; do you know Wiesbaden, Monsieur Horace?"

"I was there once for two days," answered Graham; "were you happy there too?"

"Ah yes, I was always happy with papa, but I like Wiesbaden very much. It is so pretty and gay; do you remember the Kursaal gardens? I used to walk there and listen to the band, and sometimes we sat and had coffee at the little round tables, and looked at all the people passing. And then in the evening there were the balls; last

summer I used sometimes to go to them with the Russian Princess."

"And who was the Russian Princess?" Graham inquired.

"She was a Russian lady papa knew there, and she was very kind to me; I used to walk with her, and sit by her at the tables, and prick her cards for her; she said I brought her luck."

"Prick her cards!" cried Graham.

"Yes—don't you know? at rouge-et-noir," says Madelon in explanation, "one has little cards to prick, and then one remembers how many times each colour has won; otherwise one would not know at all what to do."

"I see," said Graham; "and so your Russian Princess played at rouge-et-noir—did she win much?"

"But a great deal," cried Madelon spreading out her hands, "she always had *chance*,"

and was very rich; she wore such beautiful toilettes at the balls; she knew a great many gentlemen, and when I went with her they all danced with me."

And so on, *da capo*; it was always the same story, and Graham soon found that he had reached the limits of Madelon's experiences in that direction. As a last resource, he wrote to her American and German friends at Florence, the most respectable, apparently, of M. Linders' many doubtful acquaintance, and indeed the only ones with whose address Madelon could furnish him. From the old German he received a prompt reply. The American was absent from Florence, he said, on a visit to his own country, which was to be regretted, as it was he who had been M. Linders' friend, and who could have given more information concerning him than it was in his power to do. Indeed, for himself, he knew little

about him; he had spent the last winter at Florence, but his society and associates were not such as he, the German, affected. M. Linders had once been an artist he believed; he had spent much of his time in painting, but he knew nothing of his early life. That he was a notorious gambler he was well aware, and had heard more than one story about him that certainly placed his character in no very favourable light; more than this he could not say. Of Madelon he spoke with the warmest affection, and there was a little note enclosed to her in Graham's letter, which she placed, and carefully preserved, we may be sure, amongst her most precious treasures.

These letters written, and M. Linders' few papers, which were of little interest or importance, examined, Graham had exhausted his sources of possible information, and could only trust no obstacle would in-

tervene to prevent his little charge being at once received at the Convent, and placed under her aunt's guardianship and care. So, with as little delay as possible, they had packed up, and set off on their journey: and now, as Madelon stands at the window of the little hotel salon, Paris lies many a league behind them, beyond the great northern levels, across which they have been speeding for so many hours. And behind her too, already separated from her by a distance more impassable than that which can be counted by leagues, lies Madelon's old life, to which many and many a time, with passionate outcries perhaps, with tender unspeakable yearnings, she will look back across an ever widening space, only to see it recede more hopelessly into a remoter past.

She does not understand all this yet, however, with the new life still scarcely a week

old. She is thinking of Monsieur Horace, as she stands there looking out at the sunset sky; they have just dined, and behind her a deft waiter is removing the cloth; and in a minute she turns round gladly, as Monsieur Horace himself comes into the room.

"Shall we take a walk, Madelon?" he says, "or are you too tired?"

"I am not at all tired," Madelon answered. "I should like to have a walk; may we go and look at the convent where Aunt Thérèse lives? I should like to see it."

"That is a good idea," said Horace. "I will inquire whereabouts it is, and we will go and have a look at it."

The convent, they were told, stood on the outskirts of Liége, about a quarter of a mile outside the town, and a little off the great high road leading through Chaudfontaine and its adjacent villages to Pepinster and Spa. It was at some distance from the

hotel; but Madelon repeated that she was not at all tired, and would like a long walk, so they set off together in the mild September evening. To their left lay the old town with its picturesque churches, its quaint old Bishop's palace, its tall chimneys and busy quays, and wharves, and warehouses, stretching along the river banks; but all this they left on one side as they went along the wide, tree-planted Boulevards, where carriages were rolling, and lamps lighting, and people walking about in the ruddy glow; and presently these too were passed by, and they came out on the dusty high road. A few scattered houses were still to their right hand and to their left; but the city, with its cloud of smoke, its kindling lights and ceaseless movement, was behind them now. Of all its restless stir no sound reached them through the soft twilight but the chime of bells from its many towers, which rang out the evening

angelus just as they saw, standing on the summit of a gentle slope to their left, a building with steep grey slate roofs and belfry, rising above low white surrounding walls, and knew that they had reached their destination.

The carriage road up to the convent made a circuit, and swept round to the other side of the little declivity; but in front, separated from the high road by a hedge, there was only the slope of a ploughed field, with a gate at the lower end, opening on to a narrow path that led straight through it up the hill; and this path Graham and Madelon followed, to where it joined a weed-grown footway skirting the outer wall of the building. There was a garden inside apparently, for trees were waving their topmost branches overhead, and vines, and westeria, and Virginia creeper hung down in long, many-coloured tangled shoots and tendrils over

the angle of the wall outside. A little beyond was a side-door, with a bench placed beside it; and above, surmounted by a crucifix under a little pent-house, a narrow shelf on which stood an empty bowl and spoon, just placed there probably by some wandering pensioner, who had come there, not in vain, to seek his evening meal.

"Shall we sit down for a minute and rest?" said Graham.

Madelon seated herself at his side without speaking; she had been talking fast enough, and not without cheerfulness, during the early part of her walk; but since they had come within sight of the convent, her chatter had died away into silence. Perhaps she was tired, for she sat quite still now, and showed no wish to resume the conversation. The sound of the city chimes died away; the little bell in the belfry close by, kept up its sharp monotone for a minute

longer, and then it too was hushed; the trees whispered and rustled, the grasshoppers chirped shrilly all around, but a great stillness seemed to fall upon the darkling earth as the grey evening came down, and enfolded it in its soft mists. Grey fields stretched away on either hand, grey clouds that had been rosy-red half an hour ago, floated overhead; only the trees looked dark against the tender grey sky, the encircling hills of Liége against the lingering twilight glow.

The silent influence of the hour made itself felt on these two also, perhaps, for neither of them spoke at first; indeed, Graham's thoughts had wandered far beyond the horizon before him, when he was aroused by the sound of a little sob, and turning round, he saw that Madelon was crying.

"What is it, Madelon?" he said; "are you tired? What is the matter?"

She did not answer at once, she was struggling with her tears; at last out came the grief.

"It—it all looks so sad, and gloomy, and *triste*," she said. "I do not want to come here and be shut up in the convent; oh, take me away, take me away!"

She clung to Graham as if she were to be parted from him that moment, whilst he soothed her as best he could.

"We will go away at once if you like," he said; "I think we did wrong to come at this time of the evening; everything looks grey and cheerless now—you will see to-morrow how much brighter it will all appear."

"It is not only that," said Madelon, striving to check her sobs, "but just now, when we were sitting here, somehow I had forgotten all about where I was, and everything; and I thought I was out walking with papa, as I used to be, and I was plan-

ning what we would do to-morrow——and then all at once I remembered—and to-morrow I shall be in there, and I shall never see him again, and you will be gone too—oh, papa, papa——"

She was shaking all over with one of her sudden bursts of passionate crying. What could he do to console her? What could he say to comfort her? Not much, perhaps, but then much was not needed; only a few words, commonplace enough, I daresay—but then, as we have said, Monsieur Horace's voice and words always had a wonderful influence with our little Madelon. How is it, indeed, that amidst a hundred tones that fret and jar on our ears, there is one kind voice that has power to calm and soothe us—amid a hundred alien forms, one hand to which we cling for help and support? Graham did not say much, and yet, as Madelon listened, her sobs grew less violent, her tears

ceased, she began to control herself again.

"Listen," said Graham presently, "is not that singing that we hear? I think it must be the nuns."

Madelon raised her head, and held her breath to listen; and sure enough, from within the convent came the sound of the voices of the nuns at their evening prayers. She listened breathlessly, a change came over her face, a light into her eyes, and she tightened her grasp of Graham's hand. The melancholy voices rising and falling in unison, seemed a pathetic, melodious interpretation of the inarticulate harmonies of the evening hour.

"I like that," said Madelon, relaxing her hold as they ceased at last; "do you think they sing like that every evening, Monsieur Horace?"

"I have no doubt of it," he answered, "it is their evening service; see, that must

be the chapel where the windows are lighted up."

"Perhaps they will let me sing too," said Madelon. "Ah, I shall like that—I love singing so much; do you think they will?"

"I think it very likely," said Horace; "but now, Madelon, we must be going towards home; it is almost quite dark, and we have a long walk before us."

Madelon was almost cheerful again now. She so readily seized the brighter side of any prospect, that it was only when the dark side was too forcibly presented to her that she would consent to dwell on it; and now the sound of the nuns singing had, unconsciously to herself, idealized the life that had appeared so dull and cheerless when viewed in connection with the grey twilight, and had changed its whole aspect. When they reached the Boulevards, where the lamps were all lighted now, and the people

still walking up and down, it was she who proposed that they should sit down on one of the benches for a while.

"This is the last walk I shall have with you," she said, "for such a long, long time."

"Not so very long," said Graham, "you know I am to come and see you on my way back from Germany, and then if I can manage it, we will have another walk together."

"That will be very nice," said Madelon; and then, after a pause, she added, "Monsieur Horace, supposing Aunt Thérèse says she will not have me, what shall I do then?"

This very same question had, as we know, presented itself to Graham before now, and he had felt the full force of the possible difficulty that had now occurred to our unthinking Madelon for the first time.

"Indeed I do not know, Madelon," he answered, half laughing, "but I don't think

we need be afraid; your aunt is not likely to turn you away."

"But if she did," persisted Madelon, "what should I do? Would you take me away to live with you?"

"With me?" said Graham smiling, "I don't think that would quite do, Madelon; you know I am a soldiers' doctor, and have to go where they go, and could not have you following the regiment."

"Then you cannot come and go about as you please," said Madelon; "I thought you always went where you liked; you are not with the regiment now."

"No, I have a holiday just now; but that will come to an end in two or three weeks, and then I must do as I am bid, and go where I am told."

"And you have no home then? Ah, take me with you, Monsieur Horace, I should like to see the world—let me go with you."

"Would you like to put on a little red coat, and shoulder a musket and stand to be shot at?" says Graham, laughing at her. "I hope to see more of the world than you would quite like, I fancy, Madelon; that is, if we have any luck and get ordered out to the Crimea."

For indeed it was just the moment of the Crimean war, and while the events recorded in this little story were going on, the world was all astir with the great game in which kingdoms are staked, and a nation's destinies decided; treaties were being torn, alliances formed, armies marching, all Europe arming or standing at arms to prepare for the mighty struggle, and Graham, like many another young fellow, was watching anxiously to see whether, in the great tide rolling eastward, some wave would not reach to where he stood, and sweep him away to the scene of action.

Madelon had not heard much about the Crimea, and did not very well know what Horace meant; but she understood the first part of his speech, and she, too, laughed at this picture of herself in a little red coat. Presently, however, she recurred to her original question.

"If you were not marching about, would you let me come and live with you?" she asked again.

"Indeed, I do not say that I would," said Graham laughing, "and I don't mean to settle down for a long time yet; I have to make my fortune, you know."

"To make your fortune!" cries Madelon, pricking up her ears at the sound of the words, for indeed they had a most familiar ring in them, "why, I could do that for you," she added after a moment's pause.

"Could you?" said Graham absently; he did not follow out her thought in the least,

and, in fact, hardly heard what she said, for the words were suggestive to him also, and carried with them their own train of ideas.

"Yes, and I will too," says Madelon, in one brief moment conceiving, weighing, and forming a great resolution. "Ah, I know how to do it—I know, and I will; I promise you, and I always keep my promises, you know. I promised papa that I would never become a nun, and I never will."

"Indeed, I cannot fancy you a nun at all," said Graham, rousing himself, and getting up. "Don't you think we had better be going back to the hotel now? It is getting quite late."

"And when your fortune is made, may I come and live with you?" said Madelon without moving.

"We will see about that afterwards," he answered, smiling, "there is time enough to

think about it, you may be sure. Come, Madelon, we must be going."

"Ah, you do not know, and I will not tell you," said Madelon, jumping up as she spoke.

"What do I not know?" asked Graham, taking her hand in his, as they walked off together.

"What I will do—it is my secret, but you will see—yes, you will see, I promise you that."

She almost danced with glee as she walked along at Graham's side. He did not understand what she was talking about; he had missed the first sentence that might have given him the clue, and merely supposed that it was some childish mystery with which she was amusing herself.

But Madelon understood full well, and her busy little brain was full of plans and projects as she walked along. Make a

fortune! how many fortunes had she not seen made in a day—in an hour! "Give me only ten francs, *et je ferai fortune!*" The old speech that she had quoted years ago to Horace Graham—though, indeed, she had no remembrance of having done so—was familiar to her now as then. Ah! she knew how fortunes were made, and Monsieur Horace did not—that was strange, but it was evident to her—and she would not tell him. Her superior knowledge on this point was a hidden treasure, for a great ambition had suddenly fired our ten-year-old Madelon. Not only in maturer years are great plans laid, great campaigns imagined, great victories fought for; within the narrow walls of many a nursery, on the green lawns of many a garden, the mimic fort is raised, the siege-train laid, the fortress stormed; and in many a tiny head the germs of the passions and ambitions and

virtues of later years are already working out for themselves such paths as surrounding circumstances will allow them to find. But Madelon's childhood had known neither nursery nor sheltered home-garden. Her earliest experiences had been amidst the larger ventures of life, the deeper interests that gather round advancing years; her play-ground had been the salons of the gayest watering-places in Europe, her play-things the roulette-board and the little gold and silver pieces that had passed so freely backwards and forwards on the long green tables where desperate stakes were ventured, and fortunes won and lost in a night; and it was amongst these that she now proposed to try her own little game of enterprise, and prepare this grand surprise for Monsieur Horace. The idea was as an inspiration to her. Her whole soul was bound up in Horace Graham; I think she would willing-

ly have laid down her life for him, and have thought little of the offering; a sort of *furore* of gratitude and devotion possessed her, and here at length was an opportunity for doing something for him—something he did not know how to do for himself, great and wise though he was, and this idea added not a little zest to the plan, in Madelon's opinion, one may be sure. Ah, yes, she knew what to do, she would go to the gambling-tables, as she had seen her father and his associates go scores of times; she would win money for him, she would make his fortune!

So Madelon schemed as she walked along by Graham's side, whilst he, for his part, had already forgotten her little speech, if indeed he had ever heard it.

So it is often—a few careless words between two people, quickly spoken, soon forgotten, by at least one of them—and yet,

perhaps, destined to alter the course of two lives. Before they had reached the hotel Madelon had arranged not only the outline, but the details of her scheme. Spa was, as she well knew, but a short distance from Liége; she would at once beg her aunt to allow her to go over there for a day, or two days, if one were not enough, and then—why, once there, everything would be easy, and perhaps, even before Monsieur Horace came back from Germany, as he had said he would, all might be done, the promise redeemed, the fortune made!

A most childish and childlike plan, founded so entirely on deductions drawn from experiences in the past, so wholly without reference to the probabilities of the future, and yet not the less the result of a fixed resolution in Madelon's mind, which no subsequent change in the mere details of carrying it out could affect. For, in her small unde-

veloped character lay latent an integrity and strength of will, a tenacity of purpose, which were already beginning to work, unconsciously, and by instinct as it were, for she could assuredly never have learnt them from her father, who regarded honesty and integrity as merely inconvenient weaknesses incidental to human nature under certain conditions. But to Madelon they were precisely those sacred truths which lie hidden in our inmost hearts, and which, when once revealed to us, we cling to as our most steadfast law, and which to deny were to denounce our best and purest self. Not to every one are the same truths revealed with the same force; for the most part it is only through a searching experience that we can come clearly to understand one or another, which is to our neighbour as his most unerring instinct; and such must have been this integrity of purpose in Madelon, who, in affirming

that she always kept her promises, had uttered no idle vaunt, nor even the proved result of such experience as her short life had afforded, but had simply given expression to what she instinctively knew to be the strongest truth in her nature.

That evening, after Madelon had gone up to bed, she stood long at her open window looking out into the night. Her bedroom was high up in the hotel, and overlooked a large public Place; just opposite was a big, lighted theatre, and from where she stood she could catch the sound of the music, and could fancy the bright interior, the gay dresses, the balcony, the great chandeliers, the actors, the stage. It was her farewell for many a long day to the scenes and pleasures of her past life, but she did not know it. The sound of the music stirred within her a sort of vague excitement, an indefinite longing, and she was busy peopling the

future—a child's future, it is true, not extending beyond two or three weeks, but yet sufficient to make her forget the past for the moment. She must have stood there for nearly an hour; any one looking up might have wondered to see the little head popped out of window, the little figure so still and motionless. Up above the stars twinkled unheeded; down below other stars seemed to be dancing across the wide Place, but they were only the lamps of the carriages as they drove to and fro from the theatre. And yonder, on the outskirts of this busy town, with its lights and crowds and gay bustle, sleeping under the silent, slow-moving constellations, surrounded by the dark rustling trees, stands the still convent, where a narrow room awaits this dreaming eager little watcher. Our poor little Madelon! Not more difference between this gay, familiar music to which all her life has been set

hitherto, and the melancholy chant of the nuns, whose echoes have already passed from her memory, than between the future she is picturing to herself, and the one preparing for her—but she does not know it.

CHAPTER V.

MADEMOISELLE LINDERS.

IMMEDIATELY after breakfast the next morning Graham once more started for the convent, this time, however, leaving Madelon at the hotel. He had written from Paris to the Superior immediately after her brother's death, but had received no reply. M. Linders' letter he had kept by him to deliver in person when he should have reached Liége.

Madelon was watching for his return, and ran to meet him with a most eager face.

"Have you seen my aunt?" she said. "Am I to go?"

"Yes, you are to go, Madelon," he said, looking down on her, and taking her hands in his. "I have seen your aunt, and we have agreed that it is best I should take you there this afternoon."

He sat down and gave her some little account of the interview he had had with her father's sister; not the whole, however, for he said nothing of his own feeling of disappointment in the turn that it had taken, nor of the compassion that he felt for his little charge.

The fact of M. Linders having quarrelled with his sister had, on the whole, tended to prejudice the latter in his favour rather than otherwise, for M. Linders unfortunately seemed to have had a talent for quarrelling with every respectable friend and relation that he possessed; and it was with a strong hope of finding a good and kind guardian for Madelon in her aunt, that he had started for

the convent. He wrote a few words of explanation on his card, and this, with M. Linders' letter, he sent into the Lady Superior, and in return was requested to wait in the parlour till she should come to him. A key was handed to him, and he let himself into a large, square room, furnished with a table, a piano, and some straw chairs; a wooden grating shut off one end, within which was another table and more chairs; one or two prints of sacred subjects were on the walls, two large windows high up, showed the tops of green trees in a sunny inner courtyard.—Graham had time to take in all these details before a door on the other side of the grating opened and the Lady Superior appeared.

Mademoiselle Linders had doubtless displayed a wise judgment in her choice of life; she could never under any circumstances have shone in society, but there was

something imposing in her tall figure in its straight black draperies, and the ease and dignity to which she could never have attained in a Paris salon, she had acquired without difficulty in her convent parlour. She had worked hard to obtain her present position, and she filled it with a certain propriety of air and demeanour. But her features were harsh, and her thin, worn face, so far as could be distinguished beneath the half-concealing black veil, wore a stern, discontented expression. Somehow, Graham already felt sorry for little Madelon, as, holding M. Linders' letter in one hand, the Superior approached the grating, and sitting down on the inner side, invited him by action, rather than words, to resume his chair on the other.

"If I am not mistaken, Monsieur," she began in a constrained, formal voice, "it was from you that I received a letter

last week announcing my brother's death?"

Graham bowed.

"I thought it unnecessary to answer it," continued the Superior, "as you stated that you proposed coming to Liége almost immeniately. If I understand rightly, you attended my brother in his last illness?"

"I did, Madame—it was a short one, as you are aware——"

"Yes, yes, an accident—I understood as much from your letter," says Madame, dismissing that part of the subject with a wave of her hand; "and the little girl?"

"She is here—in Liége that is—we arrived last night."

"In this letter," says the Superior, slowly unfolding the paper, "with the contents of which you are doubtless acquainted, Monsieur——"

"I wrote it at M. Linders' dictation, Madame."

"Ah, exactly—in this letter then, I see that my brother wishes me to take charge of his child. I confess that, after all that has passed between us, I am at a loss to imagine on what grounds he can found such a request."

"But—pardon me, Madame—" said Graham, "as your brother's only surviving relative—so at least I understood him to say—you surely become the natural guardian of his child."

"My brother and I renounced each other, and parted years ago, Monsieur; were you at all intimate with him?"

"Not in the least," replied Graham, "I knew nothing, or next to nothing of him, till I attended him in his last illness; it was by the merest accident that I became, in any way, mixed up in his affairs."

"Then you are probably unaware of the character he bore," Thérèse Linders said,

suddenly exchanging her air of cold constraint for a voice and manner expressive of the bitterest scorn; "he was a gambler by profession, a man of the most reckless and dissipated life; he plunged by choice into the lowest society he could find; he broke his mother's heart before he was one-and-twenty; he neglected and all but deserted his wife; he ruined the lives of all who came in his way—he was a man without principle or feeling, without affection for any living being."

"Pardon me, Madame," Graham said again, "he was devotedly attached to his little daughter, and—and he is dead; to the dead much may surely be forgiven," for indeed at that moment his sympathies were rather with the man by whose death-bed he had watched, than with the bitter woman before him.

"There is no question of forgiveness

here," says Madame the Superior, with a slight change of manner; "I bear my brother no malice; it was not I that he injured, though he would doubtless have done so had it been in his power. In separating myself from him, I felt that I was only doing my duty; but I have kept myself informed as to his career, and had I seen any change or hope of amendment, I might have made some steps towards reconciliation."

"And that step, Madame," Graham ventured to say, "was taken by your brother on his death-bed——"

"Are you alluding to this letter, Monsieur?" she inquired, crushing it in her hand as she spoke, "you have forgotten its contents strangely, if you imagine that I can consider that as a step towards reconciliation. My brother expresses no wish of the kind; he was no hypocrite at least, and he

says with sufficient plainness, that he only turns to me as a last resource."

And, in fact, the letter was, as we know, couched in no very pleasant nor conciliatory terms, and Graham was silenced for the moment. At last,

"He appeals to your mother's memory on behalf of his child," he said.

"He does well to allude to our mother!" cried the Superior; "yes, I recognize him there—he does well to speak of her, when he knows that he broke her heart. She adored him, Monsieur, he was her one thought in life, when there were others who —who perhaps—but all that signifies little now. But in appealing to my mother's memory, he suggests the strongest reason why, even now that he is dead, I should refuse to be reconciled to his memory."

Graham was confounded by her vehemence. What argument had he to oppose

to this torrent of bitter words? Or how reason with such a woman as this—one with a show of right too on her side, as he was bound to own? He did not attempt it, but gave up the point at once, turning to a more practical consideration.

"If you are not disposed to take charge of your little niece, Madame," he said "can you at least suggest anyone in whose care she can be left? I promised her father to place her in your hands, but you must see it is impossible for me to take any further responsibility on myself. Even if I had the will, I have not at present the power."

"I never said I would not take charge of my niece, Monsieur," said the Superior.

And to what end then, wonders Graham, this grand tirade, this fine display of what to him could not but appear very like hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness? To what end, indeed? And

yet perhaps not wholly unnatural. After five-and-twenty years of convent life, Thérèse Linders still clung to the memory of the closing scenes of her worldly career, as the most eventful in the dead level of a grey monotonous life, still held to the remembrance of her mother's death, and of her fierce quarrel with her brother, as the period when all her keenest emotions had been most actively called into play. And indeed what memories are so precious to us, which, in our profound egotism, do we cherish so closely, as those of the times which stirred our strongest passions to their depth, and which, gathering up, as it were, all lesser experiences into one supreme moment, revealed to us the intensest life of which we are capable? There are women who would willingly barter months of placid existence for one such moment, though it be a bitter one; and though Mademoiselle Linders was

not one of these, or she would never have discovered that her vocation lay within the walls of a convent, she was, nevertheless, a woman capable of strong feelings, of vehement passions, and these had, perhaps, found their widest scope in the love, though it had been a wayward one, that she had felt for her mother, and in her intense jealousy of her brother. For a quarter of a century these passions had lain dormant, crushed beneath the slow routine of daily duties; but these, in their unvarying monotony, had, on the other hand, made that lapse of years appear but as a few weeks, and kept the memory of those stormy scenes fresher than that of the events that, one by one, had crept into the convent life, and slowly modified its dull course. The news of her brother's death had affected her but little; but the sight of the familiar handwriting, the very framing of the sentences and choice of words,

which had seemed to her like a fresh challenge even from his grave, had revived a thousand passions, jealousies, enmities, which one might have thought dead and buried for ever. What ghosts from old years that Graham could not see, what memories from her childhood and girlhood, what shadows from the old Paris life, were thronging round Thérèse Linders, as with changed name and dress she sat there in her convent parlour! Old familiar forms flitting to and fro, old voices ringing in her ears, her brother young, handsome, and indulged, herself plain, unprepossessing, neglected, and a mother whom she had held to and watched till the last, yet turning from her to the son who had scorned her wishes and broken her heart. It had all happened twenty-five years ago, but to the Superior it seemed but as yesterday; the old hatred blazed up again, in the form, as it doubtless

appeared to her, of an anger righteous even against the dead; nor was the revival without its charms, with all its old associations of strife and antagomism—like a breeze blowing freshly from the outer world, and suddenly stirring the slow creeping current of her daily life.

"I never said I would not take charge of my niece," she said; "on the contrary, I have every intention of so doing; I only wish to make it clearly understood that my brother had no sort of claim upon me, and that I consider every line of this letter an insult."

"His child, at least, is innocent," began Graham.

"I am not likely to hold her responsible for her father's misdeeds," says Madame drawing herself up. "I repeat that I am willing to receive my niece at once, though I cannot suppose that with the education

and training she has received, she is likely to be anything but a burthen and a care; however, that can be looked to and corrected!"

"Indeed you will find her a most innocent and loveable child," pleaded Graham eagerly, and not without an inward dismay at the idea of our little unconscious Madelon being looked to, and corrected by this grim woman, "she thinks her father was perfection, it is true, but it is through her total want of comprehension of his real character, and of the nature of his pursuits; and—believe me, Madame, it would be cruel to disturb that ignorance."

"She has nothing to fear from me in that respect," said the Superior coldly, "my brother might have spared the threats with which he insults me; his child will never hear his name mentioned by me. From the time she enters this house her past life

is at an end; she must learn to forget it, and prepare for the future she will spend here."

"Not as a nun!" cried Graham involuntarily.

"And why not as a nun, Monsieur?"

"It was her father's last wish, his dying request that she should never become a nun: it was the fear of some such design on your part that made him hesitate about sending her to you, Madame. You must surely understand from his letter how anxious he is on that point."

"I see that he proposes an alternative that I cannot contemplate for a moment; it is not to train actresses that we receive pupils at the convent, Monsieur, and I have too much regard for my niece's welfare not to prepare her for that life which on earth is the most peaceful and blessed, and which will win for its followers so rich a reward

hereafter. But pardon me—I cannot expect you to agree with me on this point, and it is one that it is useless for us to discuss."

She rose as she spoke, and Graham rose also; there was nothing more to be said.

"Then it only remains for me to bring Madelon here," he said, "and hand over to you the sum of money which M. Linders left for her use."

"That is all," replied the Superior; "if you can bring her this afternoon I shall be ready to receive her. You must accept my thanks, Monsieur, for your kindness to her, and for the trouble you have taken."

Graham, as he walked back to the hotel, was ready to vow that nothing should induce him to hand Madelon over to the care of her grim aunt. He understood now M. Linders' reluctance to send her to his sister, and sympathised with it fully. Poor little

Madelon, with her pretty, impulsive ways, her naïve ignorance, Madelon, so used to be petted and indulged, she to be shut up within those dull walls, with that horrible, harsh, unforgiving woman, to be taught and drilled, and turned into a nun—he hated to think of it! He would take her away with him, he would hide her somewhere, he would send her to his sister who had half a dozen children of her own to look after, he would make his aunt adopt her—his aunt, who would as soon have thought of adopting the Great Mogul. A thousand impossible schemes and notions flitted through the foolish young fellow's brain as he walked along, chafed and irritated with his interview—all ending, as we have seen, in his coming into the hotel and telling Madelon she was to go to the convent that very afternoon. One thing indeed he determined upon, that against her own will she should never become a nun, if it

were in his power to prevent it. He had promised her father not to lose sight of her, and, as far as he was able, he would keep his engagement.

He did not witness the meeting between his little charge and her aunt. He bade farewell to a tearful, half-frightened little Madelon at the door of the parlour, he saw it close upon her, and it was with quite a heavy heart that he turned away, leaving behind him the little girl who had occupied so large a share of his thoughts and anxieties during the last ten days. He had nothing to detain him in Liége now, and he left it the next morning, with the intention of carrying out as much of his proposed tour as he should find practicable. His original intention had been to proceed from Paris to Strasbourg, and so into Switzerland, and over the Alps to the Italian lakes. So much of his holiday was already gone, however,

that he gave up the idea of the lakes; but Switzerland might still be accomplished, and Strasbourg at any rate must be his first point, as it was there that, on leaving England, he had directed his letters to be sent in the first instance, and he expected to find them lying awaiting him.

He did find them, and their contents were such as to drive all thoughts of his tour out of his head. It was with a wild throb of excitement and exultation, such as he had never known before, that, on opening the first that came to hand, one that had been lying there for nearly a week, he read that the regiment to which he was attached was under immediate orders for the Crimea, and that he must return, without loss of time, to England. Even then, however, he did not forget little Madelon. He knew that she would be counting on his promised return, and could not bear the idea of going away

without seeing her again, and wishing her good-bye. He calculated that he had still half a day to spare, and, notwithstanding his hurry, resolved to return by Brussels rather than Paris, choosing those trains that would allow him to spend a couple of hours in Liége, and pay a visit to the convent.

It was only three days since he had last seen the white walls and grey roofs that were growing quite familiar to him now, and yet how life seemed to have changed its whole aspect to him—and not to him only, perhaps, but to somebody else too, who within those walls had been spending three of the saddest, dreariest days her small life had ever known.

When Graham asked for Madelon, he was shown, not into the parlour, but into a corridor leading to it from the outer door; straw chairs were placed here also, on either side of the grating that divided it down the

middle, and on the inner side was a window looking into another and smaller courtyard. As Graham sat there waiting, an inner door opened and a number of children came trooping out; they were the *externes*, children of the bourgeois class for the most part, who came to school twice a day at the convent; indeed they were the only pupils, the building not being large enough to accommodate boarders.

The children, laughing and chattering, vanished through the front door to disperse to their different homes, and then, in a minute, the inner door opened again, and a small figure appeared; a nun followed, but she remained in the background, whilst Madelon came forward with a look of eager expectation on the *mignonne* face that seemed to have grown thinner and paler since Graham had last seen it only three days ago. His return, so much sooner than she

had expected, had filled her with a sudden joy, and raised in her a vague hope, that she stood sadly in need of just then, poor child!

"So you see I have come back sooner than I expected, Madelon," said Graham, taking the little hands that were stretched out to him so eagerly through the grating, "but I don't know what you will say to me, for I shall not have time for the walk I promised you, when I thought I should stay two or three days in Liége. I must go away this afternoon, but I was determined not to leave without wishing you good-bye."

"Go away this afternoon!" faltered Madelon, "then you are going away quite—and I shall never see you again!"

"Yes, yes, some day, I hope," said Horace; "why, you don't think I am going to forget you? My poor little Madelon, I am sorry to have startled you, but I will explain how

it is," and then he told her how there was a great war going on, and he had been called away to join his regiment which was ordered out to the Crimea; "you know," he said smiling at her, "I told you it would never do for you to come marching about with me, and running the chance of being shot at."

He tried to speak cheerfully, but indeed it was not easy with that sad little face before him. Madelon did not answer; she only leant her head against the wooden bars of the grating, and sobbed in the most miserable, heart-broken way. It made Graham quite unhappy to see her.

"Don't cry so, Madelon," he kept on saying, almost as much distressed as she was, "I cannot bear to see you cry." And indeed he could not, for the kind-hearted young fellow had a theory that children and dogs and birds and all such irresponsible creatures

should be happy as the day is long, and there seemed something too grievous in this overpowering distress in little Madelon. She checked herself a little presently, however, drawing back one hand to wipe away her tears, while she clung to him tightly with the other. He began to talk to her again as soon as she was able to listen, saying everything he could to cheer and encourage her, telling her what he was going to do, and how he would write to her, and she must write to him, and tell him all about herself, and how she must be a good little girl, and study very hard, and learn all sorts of things, and how he would certainly come back some day and see her.

"When?" asks Madelon.

"Ah, that I cannot tell you, but before very long I hope, and meantime you must make haste and grow tall—let me see how tall shall I expect you to be? as tall as

that—" touching one of the bars above her head.

She tried to smile as she answered, "It would take me a long time to grow as tall as that."

"Not if you make haste and try very hard," he said, "and by that time you will have learnt such a number of things, music, and geography, and sewing, and—what is it little girls learn?" So he went on talking; but she scarcely answered him, only held his hands tighter and tighter, as if she was afraid he would escape from her. Something seemed to have gone from her in these last few days, something of energy, and spirit, and hopefulness; Horace had never seen her so utterly forlorn and downcast before, not even on the night of her father's death.

At last he looked at his watch, "I must go, Madelon," he said, "I have to catch the train."

"No, no, don't go!" she cried, suddenly starting from her desponding attitude, "don't go and leave me, I cannot stay here—I cannot—don't go!"

She was holding him so tightly that he could not move, her eyes fixed on his face with an intensity of pleading. He was almost sorry that he had come at all.

"My poor little Madelon," he said, "I must go—I must, you know—there—there, good-bye, good-bye."

He squeezed the little hands that were clinging so desperately to him, again and again, and then tried gently to unloose them; suddenly she relaxed her hold, and flung herself away from him. Graham hastened away without another word, but as he reached the door he turned round for one more look. Madelon had thrown herself down upon the low window seat, her face buried in her folded arms, her frame shak-

ing with sobs; the nun had come forward and was trying to comfort her—the bare grey walls, the black dresses, the despairing little figure crouching there, and outside the courtyard all aglow in the afternoon sunshine, with pigeons whirring and perching on the sloping roofs, spreading their wings against the blue sky—it was a little picture that long lived in Graham's memory. Poor little Madelon!

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE CONVENT.

NOT till Monsieur Horace was indeed gone, and there was no longer any hope of seeing him return, not till the last door was closed between them, the last link broken with the outer world, not till then perhaps did our little Madelon begin to comprehend the change that one brief fortnight had worked in her whole life. Till now, she had scarcely felt the full bitterness of her father's death, or understood that the old, happy, bright, beautiful life was at an end for ever. These last days had been so full of excitement, she had been so hurried

from one new sensation to another, that she had not had time to occupy herself exclusively with this great sorrow that had fallen upon her; but there was nothing to distract her now. Her father's death, which she had found so hard to understand in the midst of every-day life and familiar associations, she realized all too bitterly when such realization was aided by the blank convent walls, and the dull convent routine; the sorrow that had been diverted for a moment by another strong predominant feeling, returned with overwhelming force when on every side she saw none but strange faces, heard none but unfamiliar voices; liberty, and joy, and affection seemed suddenly to have taken to themselves wings and deserted her, and she was left alone with her desolation.

The child was half-crazed in these first days in the extremity of her grief; the nuns tried to console her, but she was at first be-

yond consolation. She did not know what to do with her sense of misery, her hopeless yearning, with the sudden darkness which had fallen upon her bright life, and where she was left to grope without one hand stretched out by which she could reach back, as it were, into the past, and grasp some familiar reality that should help her to a comprehension of this strange new world in which she found herself. We hear often enough of the short life of childish troubles, quickly excited, and as quickly forgotten—true enough perhaps of the griefs isolated, so to speak, in the midst of long days of happiness. But the grief that is not isolated? The grief over which the child cries itself to sleep every night, and which wakes with it in the morning, saddening and darkening with its own gloom the day which ought to be so joyous? In such a grief as this, there is, perhaps, for

the time it lasts, no sorrow so sad, so acute, so hopeless, as a child's. For us, who with our wide experience have lived through so much, and must expect to live through so much more, a strength has risen up out of our very extremity, as we have learnt to believe in a beyond, in a future that must succeed the darkest hour. But a child, as a rule, has neither past nor future; it lives in the present. The past lies behind, already half-forgotten in to-day's happiness or trouble; the future is utterly wide, vague, and impracticable, in nowise modifying or limiting the sorrow which, to its unpractised imagination, can have no ending. When a child has learnt to live in the past, or the future, rather than in the present, it has learnt one of the first and saddest of life's experiences—a lesson so hard in the learning, so impossible to unlearn in all the years to come.

A lesson that our Madelon, too, must soon take to heart, in the midst of such dreary distasteful surroundings, with a past so bright to look back upon, with a future which she can fill with any amount of day-dreams, of whatever hue she pleases—a lesson therefore, which she is not long in acquiring, but with the too usual result, a most weary impatience of the present. The first violence of her grief exhausted itself in time, as was only natural, and something of her old energy and spirit began to show itself again; but the change was not much for the better. She did not mope nor pine, that was not her way; but she became possessed with a spirit of restless petulance, which at first, indeed, was only another phase of unhappiness, but which, not being recognized as such, presently developed into a most decided wilfulness. She turned impatiently from the nun's well-meant kindness and

efforts to console her, which somehow were not what she wanted—not that, but something so different, poor child!—she was cross, peevish, fractious without intending it, scarcely knowing why; the nuns set her down as a perverse unamiable child, and so it happened, that she had not been many weeks in the convent before she came to be regarded with general disfavour and indifference, instead of with the kindly feeling that had at first been shown to the forlorn little stranger.

Graham had indeed wasted some pity on her, in imagining her under the immediate control of her aunt. The Superior had far too many things to think about for her to trouble herself with any direct superintendence of her little niece; Madelon hardly ever saw her, and, in fact, of the convent life in general she knew but little. Her lessons she soon began to do with the other

children in the class, and for the rest she was placed under the special care of one of the younger Sisters, Sœur Lucie by name.

Like Madelon, Sœur Lucie had been brought, a little ten-year-old orphan, to the convent, to be under the care of one of the nuns who was her aunt; and it was, perhaps, on this account, that she was chosen by Mademoiselle Linders as a sort of *gouvernante* for her niece. But there was no other resemblance between this placid, fair-haired, blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked Flemish girl, whose early recollections were all of farms and farmyards, of flat grassy meadows, watered by slow moving streams, of red cows feeding tranquilly in rich pastures, of milking and cheese-making, and butter-making, of dairies with shining pots and pans and spotless floors, and our vehement brown-eyed Madelon, who in her ten years had seen more of the world than Sœur Lucie was

likely to see if she lived to be a hundred. Sœur Lucie had passed a happy, peaceful childhood in the convent, and, as she grew up into girlhood, had listened submissively to the words of exhortation which urged her to give up the world, and its vanities which she had never known, and by such voluntary renunciation to pass from a state of mere negative virtue into that one of superior holiness only to be attained beneath the nun's veil, and behind the convent grating. She took the vows as soon as she was old enough, endowed the convent with her fortune, and was perfectly happy. She had neither friends nor relations outside this little world in which she had been brought up, and she desired nothing beyond what it could afford her. She had, as she well knew, secured for herself in the next world a sure compensation for any little sacrifices she might have made in this—a reflection

that often consoled her under a too prolonged course of prayer and meditation, for which, to say the truth, she had little aptitude—and for the rest, she was universally allowed to be the best compote-maker (the nuns were famous for their compotes, which were in great demand), the best embroiderer, the best altar-decorator in the convent. What more could be expected or demanded of life? Sœur Lucie, at any rate, was quite satisfied with her position, and this perfectly simple-minded, good-tempered little sister was a general favourite. Madelon could not have fallen into kinder hands; Sœur Lucie, if not always very wise, was at least very good-natured, and if she did not win much respect or admiration from our little Madelon, who was not long in discovering that she knew a great deal about a great many things that the nun had never heard or dreamt of, the poor child at least learnt

to recognize hers as a friendly face, and to turn to her in these dreary days.

The convent was neither very large nor very wealthy. The building itself had formerly been a château-farm, which, with its sheds and outlying buildings, had, many years ago, been converted with considerable alterations into its present form; rooms had been partitioned off, a little chapel had been built, the hall turned into a refectory, the farm-yard and orchard into a pleasant sunny garden with lawn, and flower-beds, and shrubs, with vines and fruit-trees alternating with creepers along the old walls. As for the sisters, few were from the upper ranks of society, belonging, for the most part, rather to the middle and bourgeois class. Mademoiselle Linders had gained her present position not less by her superior birth and education, than by that to which she would more willingly have at-

tributed her elevation—a certain asceticism of life which she affected, an extra observance of fasts and vigils, which the good nuns looked upon with reverence, without caring to emulate such peculiar sanctity in their own persons. The rule was not a strict one, nor, though the Superior was careful to enforce it to its utmost rigour, was the life one of particular hardship or privation. They were a simple, kind, good-hearted set, these sisters, having their little disputes, and contentions, and jealousies among themselves occasionally, no doubt, but leading good, peaceable lives on the whole, with each day and hour well filled with its appointed tasks, leading through a continual, not useless round of embroidery, teaching, compote-making, and prayers.

Perhaps some one looking round on them, with their honest, homely Belgian faces, would have tried to imagine some history

for them, in accordance with the traditions that cling about convent walls, and associate themselves with the very mention of a nun; and most likely they would have been all wrong. None of these sisters had had very eventful lives, and they had, for the most part, dropped into their present mode of existence quite naturally. With little romance to look back upon, save such as finds a place in even the homeliest life, with an imperfect middle-class education that had failed to elevate the mind, or give it wide conceptions of life, and religion, and duty, a certain satisfaction at having done with secular life and its cares, and at having their future here and hereafter comfortably provided for, was perhaps the general tone amongst this prosaic, unimaginative community. We are, indeed, far from affirming that in that little society there was no higher tone of religious enthusiasm, that there were not

some who not only found their highest religious ideal in the life they had chosen, but to whom it formed, in fact, the highest ideal to which they could attain, and calculated, therefore, to develop in them the best and noblest part of their natures. To such, the appointed, monotonous round, the unquestioning submission to the will of another, the obedience at once voluntary and enforced, would not only bring a gracious sense of repose after conflict, but, by satisfying their religious cravings and aspirations, by demanding the exercise of those virtues which appeared to them at once the highest and the most attainable, would give peace to souls which, in the world's active life, would have tossed for ever to and fro in reckless unquiet warfare, nor have ever once perceived that in such warfare they might, after all, be fulfilling the noblest ends. "Peace, and rest, and time for heavenly meditation," they

had cried, stretching out weary hands to this quiet little harbour of refuge, and perhaps—who knows? they had there found them.

Such, then, was this little world in which our Madelon suddenly found herself placed, to her utter bewilderment at first, so alien was it to all her former experiences, so little could she understand of its meaning, its aims, its spirit and intention; no more than, as it seemed to her, those around her understood her, or her wants and wishes. To her, the convent only appeared inexpressibly *triste* and dreary, a round of dull tasks, enlivened by duller recreations, day after day, for ever bounded by those blank, grey walls—no change, no variety, no escape. The bare, scantily-furnished rooms, the furniture itself, the food, the nuns' perpetual black dress, and ungraceful headgear,——Madelon hated them all, as she gradually recovered from

her first desolation, and became alive again to external impressions; and, as the first keenness of her sorrow wore off, this vague sense of general unhappiness and discomfort showed itself in an attitude of opposition and defiance to every one, and everything around her. From being helplessly wretched and cross, she became distinctly naughty, and before long our Madelon had drifted into the hopeless position of a child always refractory, always in disgrace, a position from which, when once assumed, it is almost impossible for the small hapless delinquent to struggle free.

That Madelon was very naughty cannot be denied, and the fact surprised no one so much as herself. The nuns, accustomed to all sorts of children of every variety of temper, of every shade of docility and wilfulness, of cleverness and stupidity, found nothing astonishing in one more perverse little

specimen, but Madelon could not understand it at all. She was not used to feeling naughty, and did not know what it meant at first. In her life hitherto, when she had been as happy as the day is long, she had had singularly few opportunities for exercising the privilege of every child of Adam, and exhibiting her original waywardness. But it was far otherwise now, and she could not understand why she always felt cross, always obstinate, always perverse; she only knew that she was very miserable, and it was quite a discovery to be told one day that it was because she was naughty, and that if she were good she would be happy.

"I always am good," says Madelon, firing up, and speaking from the experience of former days, "and I am not at all happy —I never shall be here."

But alas! it was proved too clearly that she was not at all good, and indeed she be-

gan to think so herself, only she did not see how she could help it.

Madelon got into great disgrace in the very first weeks after her arrival at the convent, and this was the occasion of it. The only room vacant for her was a cell that had been occupied by a sister who had died a short time previously, a sister of a devout turn of mind, who had assisted her meditations by the contemplation of a skull of unusual size and shininess. The cell was a cheerful, narrow little room, looking out on the convent garden, and the first pleasant sensation that Madelon knew in the convent was when she was taken into it, and saw the afternoon sun shining upon its white-washed walls, and the late climbing roses nodding in at the open window; but she became possessed with a perfect horror of the skull. She discovered it the first evening when she was going to bed, and was quite

glad to pop her head under the bed-clothes, to shut out all sight and thought of it. But awaking again that first night in her grief and loneliness, she saw a stray moonbeam shining in, and lighting it up into ghastly whiteness and distinctness, as it stood on a little bracket against the wall beneath a tall wooden crucifix. For the first minute she was half paralysed with terror; she lay staring at it without power to move, and then she would assuredly have run to some one for protection had she known to whom to go, or, indeed, had she not been too terrified to do more than hide her head under the counterpane again. From that time it became a perpetual nightmare to her. By day its terrors were less apparent, though even then, with her innate love for all things bright, and joyous, and pleasant, it was a positive grief to her to have such a grim object before her eyes whenever she came into the room; but

at night no sooner was she in bed, and the light taken away, than her imagination conjured up a hundred frightful shapes, that all associated themselves with the grinning death's head. In vain she covered it up, in vain she shut her eyes—sleeping or waking it seemed always there. At length she could bear it no longer, and entreated piteously that it might be taken away; but Sœur Lucie, to whom the little prayer was made, did not view the matter in at all the same light as Madelon. In the first place, it formed part of the furniture of the room, and had always been there, so far as she knew—which, to the nun, whose life was founded on a series of unquestioned precedents, allowing of nothing arbitrary but the will of the Superior, appeared an unanswerable reason why it should always remain; and, in the next place, with the lack of sympathy that one sometimes remarks in unima-

ginative minds, she did not in the least understand the terror with which it inspired the child, but assured her, in her good-humoured way, that that was all nonsense, and that she would get over it in time. So the skull remained, and Madelon was miserable, till one night, in a moment of desperation, she jumped out of bed, seized it with both hands, and flung it with all her might through the window into the garden below. She was frightened when she heard the crash of falling glass, for in her excitement she had never stopped to open the window, but greatly relieved, notwithstanding, to think that her enemy was gone, and slept more soundly that night than she had done for a long time previously.

Next morning, however, Madelon had a cold, a pane of glass was found in fragments on the gravel walk beneath the window, a skull was discovered, lying among the long

grass on the lawn; one can fancy the exclamations, the inquiries, the commotion. Madelon, though not a little frightened, avowed boldly enough what she had done, and so far gained her end that the skull never re-appeared, and a safe precedent was established for Sœur Lucie's future guidance; but she got into great trouble at the time, and gained moreover the unenviable distinction of having committed a deed of unparalleled audacity. After this, what might not be expected of such a child? The nuns at once formed a bad opinion of her, which they owed it to themselves to confirm on the occasion of each succeeding offence, by a reference to this past misdeed which had first taught them of what enormities she was capable.

Matters were no better when there came to be a question of lessons. Madelon did not mind the actual learning, though she

wearied a little of the continued application to which she was unused; but she resented to the last degree the astonishment that her ignorance on all sorts of subjects excited both in the nuns who taught her, and in the other children in the class, and which was expressed with sufficient distinctness. "Never studied geography, nor history, nor arithmetic!" cries Sœur Ursule, who superintended the school; "not know the principal cities in Europe, nor the Kings of France, nor even your multiplication table!" These speeches, with strongly implied notes of admiration after each sentence, and illustrated by the expression on the faces of a small, open-mouthed audience in the background, roused Madelon's most indignant feelings; she rebelled alike against the injustice of being held up to public reprobation for not knowing what she had never been taught, and against the imputations cast upon her education hitherto. "I can do a great many things

you cannot," she would answer defiantly, "I can talk English, and German, and Italian —you can't; I can dance—you can't; I can sing songs, and—and oh! a great many things that you cannot do!" A speech of this sort would bring our poor Madelon into dire disgrace we may be sure; and then angry, impenitent, she would go away into some corner, and cry, oh! how sadly for her father, for the happy old days, for Monsieur Horace too, perhaps, to come, back and take her out of all this misery.

Behind the convent was a strip of ground, which produced cabbages and snails on one side, and apple trees on the other; a straight walk divided these useful productions from each other. When Madelon was *en pénitence*, she used sometimes to be sent to walk here alone during the hour of recreation, and would wander disconsolately enough among the apple trees,

counting the apples by way of something to do, and getting intimately acquainted with the snails and green caterpillars amongst the cabbages. Our poor little Madelon! I could almost wish that we had kept her always in that pretty green valley where we first saw her; but I suppose in every life there come times when cabbages, or things of no cheerfuller aspect than cabbages, are the only prospect, and this was one of her times. She used to feel very unhappy and very lonely as she paced up and down, thinking of the past—ah, how far that past already lay behind her, how separate, how different from anything she did, or saw, or heard in these dull days! She did not find many friends to console her in her troubles; good-natured Sœur Lucie did indeed try to comfort her when she found her crying, and, though she was not very successful in her efforts, Madeleine began to give her almost as much

gratitude as if she had been. Sœur Lucie could not think of anything to tell her but that she was very naughty, and must try to be good, which Madelon knew too well already. It would have been more to the purpose, perhaps, if she had told her she was not so very bad after all, but Sœur Lucie never thought of that; perhaps she did not care much about the child; by this time Madelon was beginning to be established as the black sheep of the little community, and Sœur Lucie only expressed the general sense; but being very good-natured, she said in a kind way what other people said disagreeably.

Neither from her companions did she meet with much sympathy, and, indeed, when out of disgrace, Madelon was apt to be rather ungracious to her schoolfellows, with whom she had little in common. The children who came daily to the convent were of two classes—children of the poor,

and children of a higher bourgeois grade, shopkeepers for the most part. Madelon was naturally classed with the latter of these two sets during the lesson hours, but she stood decidedly aloof from them afterwards, at first through shyness, and then with a sort of wondering disdain. She had never been used to children's society; all her life her father had been careful to keep her apart from companions of her own age, and, accustomed to associate continually with grown-up people, she chose to regard with great contempt the trivial chatter, and squabbles, and amusements of her small contemporaries. After a time, indeed, she condescended to astonish their minds with some of her old stories, and was gratified by the admiration of a round-eyed, open-mouthed audience, who listened with rapt attention as she related some of the glories of past days, balls, and theatres, and Kursaals,

Princes and Counts, and fine dresses; it served in some sort to maintain the sense of superiority which was sorely tried during the untoward events of the lesson-hours; but this also was destined to come to an end. One day there was a whispering among her listeners, which resulted in the smallest of them saying boldly,

"Marie-Louise says your papa must have been a very bad man."

"What!" cries Madelon, jumping off the high stool on which she had been seated. This little scene took place during the hour of recreation, when the children ate their luncheon of bread and fruit.

"Ah, yes," says Marie-Louise, a broad-faced, flaxen-haired damsel, half a head taller than Madelon, and nodding her head knowingly. "Those are very fine stories that you tell us there, Mademoiselle, but when I related them at home they said it was

clear your papa must have been a very wicked man."

Madelon turned quite white and walked up to the girl, her teeth set, her small fists clenched. "*You* are wicked!" she stammered out, "how dare you say such things? I— I will never speak to you again!" and then she turned, and walked off without another word.

The matter did not end here, however, for the children talked of it among themselves, the nuns heard of it, and, finally, it reached the ears of Madame la Supérieure herself. Madelon, summoned into the awful presence of her aunt, received the strictest orders never again to refer to these past experiences in any way. "You are my child now," says Madame, overwhelming the poor little culprit before her with her severest demeanour, "and must learn to forget all these follies." If Madelon feared any-

one, it was her aunt, who had never cared to win her little niece's love by any show of affection; the child came before her trembling, and escaped from her gladly. She had no inclination to draw down further reprimands by disobedience in this particular, so far as words went, nor indeed had she any temptation to do so. From this time she kept more apart from the rest of the children, rarely joining in their games, and preferring even Sœur Lucie's society to that of her small companions. So, altogether, Madelon's first attempts at a convent life were not a success, and time only brought other sad deficiencies to light.

Whatever the nuns may have thought or said, concerning her ignorance of history, geography, and arithmetic, it was a far more serious matter when there came to be a question of her religious knowledge. The good sisters were really horrified at the

complete blank they found, and lost no time in putting her through a course of the most orthodox instruction. Before she had been a month in the convent, she knew almost as much as Nanette, had learnt why people go to church and what they do there, had studied her catechism, could find her places in her prayer-book, could repeat Ave Marias and Paternosters, and tell her beads like everyone else. And so Madelon's questions are answered at last, her perplexities solved, her yearnings satisfied! She apprehended quickly all that she was taught, so far as in her lay, and vaguely perceived something still beyond her powers of apprehension, something that still confusedly connected itself with the great church, with the violinist's playing, with the pictures and the music of old days, and which, for the present, in her new life, found its clearest expression, not in the nuns'

teaching, for, kind and affectionate as it in truth was, it was marred from the first to Madelon by the inevitable exclamation of wonder and horror that she should not know all about it already—not in the questions and answers in her catechism, nor in the religious dogmas and formulas which she accepted, but could hardly appreciate—not in all these, but in the little chapel with its gaudy altars, and twinkling lights, its services, and music, and incense. Indeed, apart from all higher considerations, the pictures, the colouring, the singing, all were the happiest relief to the child, who, used to perpetual change and brightness, wearied indescribably of the dull, colourless life, the uniform dress, the want of all artistic beauty in the convent. Her greatest reward when she had been good was to be allowed to join in the singing in the chapel—her great-

est punishment, to be banished from the evening services.

No need, however, to pursue this part of little Madelon's history further. With the nuns' instruction, and the learning of her catechism, vanished all that had distinguished her, in this respect, from other children of her years and station. She had learnt most of what can be learnt by such teaching, and for her, as for others, there remained the verifying and realization of these lessons, according to her capacity and experience. Only, one may somehow feel sure, that to this passionate, wilful little nature, religion would hardly present itself as one simple, sublime truth, high, pure, and serene as the over-arching, all-embracing heaven, through which the sun shines down on the clashing creeds of men; but rather as a complex, many-sided problem, too often at variance with her scheme of life, to be felt

after through the medium of conflicting emotions, to be worked out at last through what doubts, questionings, with what perplexities, strivings, yearnings, cries for light—along this in nowise singular path, no need to follow our little Madelon.

For the rest, she imbibed readily enough at this time many of the particular views of religious subjects affected by the nuns, at first, indeed, not without a certain incredulity that such things could be, when her father had never spoken to her about them, nor made her aware of their existence; but presently, with more confidence, as she remembered that he was to have told her all about them when she was older. There were the legends and histories of the saints, for instance, in which Madelon learnt to take special delight, though it may be feared that she regarded them rather as pretty romantic stories, illustrated and glorified by

her recollections of the old pictures in Florence, than as the vehicle of religious instruction that the nuns would willingly have made then. She used to beg Sœur Lucie to tell them to her again and again, and the good little nun, delighted to find at least one pious disposition in her small rebellious charge, was always ready to comply with her request, and went over the whole list of saints and their lives, not sparing one miracle or miraculous virtue we may be sure, and telling them all in her simple, matter-of-fact language, with details drawn from her daily life to give a touch of reality, which invested the mystic old Eastern and Southern legends with a quaint naïve homeliness not without its own charm—like the same subjects as interpreted by some of the old Dutch and Flemish masters, in contrast with the high-wrought, idealised conceptions of the earlier Italian schools. But it was through the

medium of these last that Madelon saw them all pass before her—St. Cecilia, St. Catherine, St. Dorothea, St. Agnes, St. Elizabeth—she knew them all by name. Sœur Lucie almost changed her opinion of Madelon when she discovered this—for about a day and a half that is, till the child's next flagrant delinquency—and Madelon found a host of recollections in which she might safely indulge, as she chatted to Sœur Lucie about the pictures, and galleries, and churches of Florence, not a little pleased when the nun's exclamations and questions revealed that she herself had never seen but two churches in her life, that near her old home, and the convent chapel.

"Oh, I have seen a great many," Madelon would say, "and palaces too; I daresay you never saw a palace either? but I like the churches best because of the chapels, and altars, and tombs, and pictures. At

Florence the churches were so big—oh! as big as the whole convent—but I think the chapel here very pretty too; will you let me help you to decorate the altar for the next fête, if I am good?"

So she chattered on, and these were her happiest hours perhaps. Sometimes she would be allowed to accompany Sœur Lucie to the big kitchen, and assist in the grand compote-making, which seemed to be going on at all seasons of the year. There, sometimes helping, sometimes perched on her favourite seat on the corner of the table, Madelon would forget her sorrows for a while in the contemplation of the old farm-kitchen with its rough white-washed walls, decorated with pots and pans, and shining kettles, its shelves with endless rows of blue and white crockery, its great black rafters crossing below the high-pitched ceiling, leaving a gloomy space, full of mystery to Madelon's

imagination; and then, below, the long white wooden table, the piles of fruit, the busy figures of the nuns as they moved to and fro. Outside in the courtyard the sun would be shining perhaps, the trees would wave, and cast flickering shadows on Madelon as she sat, the pigeons would come fluttering and perching on the windowsill, and Sœur Lucie, whilst paring, cutting, boiling, skimming, would crone out for Madelon's benefit the old tales she knew so well that she could almost have repeated them in her sleep. Madelon only begged to be let off the tragical ending, which she could not bear, at last always stopping her ears when the critical moment of the sword, or the wheel, or the fire approached. She took great interest in the history of Ste. Thérèse, especially in the account of her running away in her childhood, which seemed to her most worthy of imitation—only, thinks

Madelon, she would have taken care not to have been caught, and brought back again. The subsequent history of the saint she found less edifying; nothing that savoured of conventual life found favour in Madelon's eyes in these days; and indeed her whole faith in saints and legends was rudely shaken one day by a broad and somewhat reckless assertion on the part of Sœur Lucie, that all the female saints had been nuns—an assertion certainly unsupported by the facts, whether legendary or ascertained, but which had somehow become a fixed idea in Sœur Lucie's mind, and was dear to the heart of the little nun.

"They were not nuns like you, then," says Madelon at last, after some combating of the point, "for they could go out, and walk about, and do a great many things you must not do—and if I were a saint, I would never, never become a nun!"

"But it is the nuns that have become saints," cries Sœur Lucie, with the happiest conviction; and Madelon, unable to argue out her own ideas on the subject, contented herself with repeating, that anyhow they had not all been nuns like Sœur Lucie, which was indisputable.

These were, as we have said, Madelon's happiest times, and, indeed, they hardly repaid the child for long days of weariness and despondency, for hours of heart-sick longing for she knew not what, of objectless hoping, of that saddest form of home-sickness, that knows of no home for which to pine. In all the future there was but one point on which her mind could rest—Monsieur Horace's promised return, and that was too vague, too remote to afford her much comfort. And her own promise to him, had she forgotten that? She would not have been the Madelon that we know

if she had done so, but we need hardly say that she had not been two days in the convent, before she instinctively perceived how futile were all those poor little schemes with which she had been so busy the evening before she parted with Graham, how impossible it would be to ask or obtain her aunt's permission for going to Spa on such an errand. The convent was to all intents and purposes a prison to our little Madelon, and she could only wait and cherish her purpose till a happier moment.

She heard twice from Graham in the first few months. He wrote just before leaving England, and once from the Crimea; but this last letter elicited an icy response from the Superior, to the effect generally that her niece being now under her care, and receiving the education that would fit her for the life that would be hers for the future, she wished all old connections and as-

sociations to be broken off; in short, that it would be useless for Graham to write any more letters, as Madelon would not be allowed to see them. Graham received this letter at Balaklava, at the end of a long day's work, and laughed out loud as he read the stiff, formal little epistle, which, to the young man in the midst of the whirl and bustle of camps and hospitals, seemed like a voice from another world; there was something too ludicrous in the notion of a child of eleven years old being forbidden to receive letters, because she might possibly be a nun nine or ten years hence.

"As for that, we'll see about it by-and-by, old lady," he said to himself, "but in the meantime there is no use in writing letters that are not to be delivered," and then he thrust Mademoiselle Linders' letter into his pocket and thought no more about it.

So Madelon heard nothing more of Mon-

sieur Horace, though she often, often thought of him, and wondered what he was doing. He was very busy, very hard-worked; an army-surgeon had no sinecure in the Crimea in those days, as we know, and it was perhaps well for the child, who cared more for him than for anyone else in the world, that she knew nothing of his life at this time, of wintry battle-fields and hospital-tents, of camps and trenches, where, day and night, he had to fight his own battle with sickness, and wounds, and death. No news from the war came to Madelon's ears, no whisper from all the din and clamour that were filling Europe, penetrated to this quiet, out-of-the-world, little world in which her lot was cast. The mighty thunder of the guns before Sebastopol rolled, echoing, to the north, and roused sunny cities basking in the south, and stirred a million hearts in the far islands of the west; but it died away before

the vine-covered gate, the whitewashed walls of the little Belgian convent. There, life stole on at an even pace, little asked of it, yielding little in return, and amongst that peaceful Sisterhood, one little restless spirit, ever seeking and feeling after what she could not find, looking in the faces of all around her, if so be some one could help her, and, with a child's instinct, rejecting each in turn.

CHAPTER VII.

FEVER.

FOR more than two uneventful years Madeleine remained in the convent; but early in the third spring after her arrival, a low fever broke out, which for the time completely disturbed the peaceful, even current of existence there, and, by its results, altered, as it happened, the whole course of her own life.

She was between twelve and thirteen then, and had grown into a slim little maiden, rather tall for her age, with a little pale face as in old days, but with her wavy brown hair all braided now, and fastened

in long plaits round her head. In these two years she has become somewhat reconciled to her convent life; not indeed as a permanent arrangement—it never occurred to her to regard it in that light—but as something that must be endured till a new future should open out before her. She learns her lessons, sings in the chapel, knows something of compote-making, and can embroider with skilful little fingers almost after Sœur Lucie's own heart. She still holds aloof from her companions, turning to Sœur Lucie for society, though rather with the feeling of the simple-hearted little nun being *bon camarade*, than with any deeper sentiment of friendship or respect. She is rarely *en pénitence* now; the vehement little spirit seems laid, and if something of her old spring and energy have gone with it, if she is sometimes sad, and almost always quiet, there is no one to note it much, or to heed the

change that has apparently come over her.

And yet Madelon was in truth little altered, and was scarcely less of a child than when Graham had brought her to the convent. She had learned a variety of things, it is true; she could have named all the principal cities in Europe now, and though she still stumbled over the Kings of France, her multiplication-table was unexceptionable; but her education had been one of acquisition rather than of development. Her mind had not yet had time to assimilate itself with those around her, nor to become reconciled to the life that was so at variance with all her old traditions; and she maintained a nucleus, as it were, of independant thought, which no mere extraneous influences or knowledge could affect. In the total silence imposed upon herself, and those around her, concerning her past life, there had been no possibility of modifying her

ideas on that subject, and they were still at the same point as when she entered the convent. She still clung to her father's memory, with all the passionate love of which her ardent little soul was capable; she still believed in his perfection, and held to her recollections of the old days with a strength and tenacity only enhanced by the contrast which her present life daily forced upon her. The past lived in her memory as a bright, changeful dream, varying from one pleasure to another, with an ever-shifting background of fair, foreign towns and cities, Kursaals, palaces, salons, gardens, mountains, and lakes, and quiet green nooks of country—all, as it seemed to her with the power of generalization that seizes on the most salient points, and takes them as types of the whole, shining in sunlight that never clouded, under clear, blue skies that never darkened. Madelon knew

that that time had gone by for ever, and yet in all her dreams for the future, her imagination never went beyond a repetition of it all; only for her father she, perhaps, substituted Monsieur Horace. For Monsieur Horace, we may be sure, was not forgotten, any more than her promise to him; though, indeed, this last had been so long in abeyance, that she had ceased to think of it as likely to be speedily fulfilled. She had almost come to regard it as one of the many things referred to that somewhat vague period when she should be grown up, and when, in some way—how, she did not know—she would be released from the convent and from Aunt Thérèse, and be at liberty to come and go as she pleased. In the meantime, she had almost given up hoping for Monsieur Horace's return. The time when she had last seen him, and heard from him, already seemed so remote to her childish

memory; no one ever spoke to her about him, and he never wrote to her. She did not for a moment think he had forgotten her, she had too much confidence in him for that; but, by degrees, a notion, vague at first, but gradually becoming a fixed idea destined to have results, established itself in foolish little Madelon's head, that he was waiting till he should hear from her that his fortune was made, before he would come back to her. Madelon would get quite unhappy when she thought of this—he must think her so faithless and forgetful, yet how could she help it? That the promise had made as deep an impression upon him as upon her, she never doubted for a moment; and was it not most possible, and even probable, that he was expecting to hear of the result, perhaps even in want of this wonderful fortune, on which he must be counting? It was a sad thought, this, to our Madelon,

but gradually it became a confirmed one in her mind.

How long this state of things would have lasted—whether, with the fading of childish impressions, present abiding influences might have taken possession of her, whether, some few years hence, some sudden development of her devotional tendencies might have roused her latent powers of enthusiasm, and turned them in a new direction, just at the moment when youthful ardour is most readily kindled, and tender fervent hearts most easily touched—whether, in such a case, our little Madelon, inspired with new beliefs, would have renounced her old life in the fervour of her acceptance of the new, and, after all, have taken the nun's vows, and been content to allow her native energy and earnestness to find scope in the loftiest aspirations of a convent life—all this can never now be known. Something there

was in her character which, under certain conditions, might have developed in such a direction. The time might, indeed surely would have come, had she remained in the convent, when a sudden need and hunger for sympathy, and perhaps excitement, would have risen in her soul, too keen and imperative to be satisfied with past memories; and when, in the absence of all support and friendship in the outer world, she might have seized on whatever she could find in the narrow circle in which she moved, to still that imperious craving. Not in vain, then, might have appeared those old dreams and visions in Florence long ago. Madelon might have learnt to find in them a new and deep significance, an interpretation in accordance with her latest teaching, and through the dim years they might have come back to her—prophetic warnings, as she might have been taught to consider

them—linking themselves with present influences, to urge her on to one course. Her father's last command, her own promises, sacred as she held them now, might have availed nothing then, against what she might have been taught to consider a voice from on high, a call of more than earthly authority.

Such, we say, might have been the turn things would have taken with Madelon, had the uninterrupted, monotonous convent life continued to be hers. But long before her mind was prepared for any such influences, early in the third year after her father's death, certain events occurred, which brought this period of her history to an abrupt close.

How, or why the fever broke out—whether it was the result of a damp, unhealthy winter, or through infection brought by one of the school-children, or from any

other obvious cause, we need not inquire here. It first showed itself about the middle of February, and within a fortnight half the nuns had taken it, the school was broken up, and the whole convent turned into a hospital for the sick and dying.

Two of the sisters died within the first week or two; one was very old, so old indeed, that the fever seemed to be only the decisive touch needed to extinguish the feeble life, that had been uncertainly wavering for months previously; the other was younger, and much beloved. And then came a sense as of some general great calamity, a sort of awe-struck mourning, with which real grief had perhaps little to do. The Superior herself had been struck with the fever, and in three days she was dead. Her vigils, her fastings, the wearying abnegations of her stern, hard life had left her little strength for struggling against the dis-

ease when it laid hold of her at last, and so she too died in her cell one cold, bleak March morning, with a hushed sisterhood gathered round her death-bed, and gazing on it, as on that of a departing saint. Little beloved, but much revered, Thérèse Linders also had got that she had laboured for, and was now gone to prove the worth of it; that which she had valued most in her narrow world had been awarded her to the full—much honour, but small affection; much glorification to her memory as to one of surpassing sanctity, few tears of tender or regretful recollection. She had had a strange, loveless life, with a certain pathos in it too, as in the life of every human being, if looked at aright. Not always, one may imagine, had such cold relentless pietism, such harsh indifference possessed her. She lies there now, still and silent for evermore on earth, a crucifix between her hands,

tapers burning at her head and feet, with the hard lines fixed on her cold grey face; and yet she also had been a little, soft, round child, with yearnings too, like other children, for a mother's kisses and a mother's love. "Go away, Adolphe, you are very naughty, and I do not love you; mamma always kisses you, and she never, never kisses me!" This little speech, uttered by our poor saintly Superior when she was but eight years old, may perhaps give the key to much in her after life; and if we cannot, with an admiring sisterhood, henceforth count this unhappy, soured woman in our catalogue of saints, we will at least grant her a place amongst the great company of "might-have-beens," most inscrutable problems in this puzzling life of ours, and so bid her a not unkindly farewell.

Madelon, meanwhile, knew nothing of these things; she had taken the fever also,

and while death was busy in other parts of the convent, she lay unconscious in her little cell, tossing in delirium, or lying in feverish stupor, with Sœur Lucie coming softly in and out. In this desolated overworked household, the child had come to be considered as only another item of trouble, hardly of anxiety; for her life or death just then was felt to be of the very smallest consequence to anyonè. The one tie that had bound her to the convent had been snapped by her aunt's death; if she lives, think the nuns—if indeed they find time to think of her at all—she is a burthen on our hands; if she dies, well then, one more coffin and another grave. This is perhaps the ebb-tide of Madelon's importance in the world; never before has been, never again will be, we may trust, her existence of so little moment to any human being—that existence which, meanwhile, in spite of all such in-

difference, in perfect unconsciousness of it indeed, is beginning to assert itself again. For though the Superior has died amidst lamentations, and the places of Sœurs Eulalie and Marguerite will know them no more, our little Madeleine, over whom there are none to lament or rejoice, will live.

One afternoon she awoke, as from a long sleeep. The low sun was shining into the cell, lighting up the wooden crucifix on the white-washed wall; Sœur Lucie, in her strait coif and long black veil, was sitting by the bedside reading her book of hours; through the window could be seen a strip of blue sky crossed by some budding tree in the convent garden, little birds were beginning to chirp and twitter amongst the branches. The spring had come in these last days whilst Madelon had been lying there, and in the midst of the glad resurrection of all nature, she too was stirring and awakening to consciousness, and a new life.

CHAPTER VIII.

MADELON OVERHEARS A CONVERSATION.

AMIDST the springing flowers, the twitter of pairing birds, and the bursting of green leaves through the brown, downy husks, in the bounteous April weather, Madelon began to recover rapidly. She was nursed with kindness and care, if not exactly with tenderness, by Sœur Lucie; but tenderness our little black sheep had long since learnt not to expect in the convent, and she hardly missed it now. It was in the first days of her convalescence that she heard of the death of her Aunt Thérèse, through some chance remark of one of the Sisters

who came into her cell. Had it not been for this, they would have kept it from her longer; but the news scarcely affected her at all. Her aunt had shown her no affection in these last two years that they had lived under the same roof, and, on the few occasions on which Madelon had come in contact with her, the pale, cold face, and severe manner of the nun had inspired her niece with a dread, which only lacked opportunity to become a more active dislike. She heard the news then with apathy, and was still too languid and weak to think of the loss in reference to herself, or to realize that, so far as she knew, she had now no relation in the world. Nor did such realization come at once, even when she grew stronger; her aunt had counted for so little in her present mode of life, that it did not occur to her that her death might bring any possible change into it; indeed, as we have

said, she had ceased to look for any immediate change. Monsieur Horace had brought her to the convent, and Sœur Lucie took care of her there, and so she supposed matters would go on for the present.

If, however, the news of her aunt's death affected her but little, it was quite otherwise with another conversation that she overheard a few days later, and which, indeed, was not meant for her ears either. She had awakened one evening from a long, sound sleep, and was lying quietly in the dusk, dreamily wondering how soon she should make up her mind to arouse herself and take the medicine that she knew awaited her as soon as she should declare herself awake, when Sœur Ursule entered the room. She had come with some message to Sœur Lucie, and when it was delivered, stood chatting for a few minutes by the window where Sœur Lucie sat knitting. She was a

gaunt, brisk, elderly woman, who had been governess in a large school, before an opportune legacy had enabled her to fulfil her dearest wish and enter the convent, where, with fresh zeal and energy, she resumed the duties most congenial to her, as teacher and superintendent of the school. Thoroughly devout and conscientious, and with a kind heart *au fond*, she nevertheless brought with her into her new sphere all the habits and modes of thought acquired during a long struggle with a very hard, secular world—— a practical turn of mind, verging on hardness, a dictatorial manner, a certain opinionativeness, which still showed itself now and then in oddest contrast with the habitual submission demanded of a nun.

"She looks better this evening," she said now, nodding towards the bed where Madelon lay with her eyes still closed.

"Yes, yes, she is getting on; I shall have

her up to-morrow, I hope," answered Sœur Lucie, with some natural pride in this specimen of successful nursing.

"Ah, well—she could have been better spared though, than some that are gone," answered the other; "but no doubt it is all for the best. Not but that I am glad that the child is recovering—still we shall certainly find her a great burthen on our hands."

"It is true, then," cried Sœur Lucie, "what I heard Sœur Marie saying—that our sainted mother had bequeathed her to the care of the convent, and left directions that she is to take the veil as soon as she is old enough."

"Yes, it is true enough, and, as I was saying, all is no doubt for the best; otherwise it is really a great charge for us to have a child of that age on our hands to bring up."

"But that was just my case," replied Sœur Lucie simply. "I have not been out of the convent for more than six months since I was ten years old, as you know, Sœur Ursule."

"You, *ma Sœur!* That was quite a different matter; everyone knows what a marked vocation you had even in your childhood, and how willingly you devoted your fortune, and resigned all worldly hopes —whereas this little one has always been the most tiresome child in the class, and, moreover, will have to live at the expense of the convent."

"That is true," said Sœur Lucie reflecting; "I never heard that she had any money, and of course people cannot live for nothing."

"She has not a sou—you may depend upon it," said Sœur Ursule emphatically; "she brought nothing with her when she came."

"Nothing!" cried Sœur Lucie.

"Or so little, that it must all be gone by this time. I really do not see how it can be arranged—Sœurs Marie and Catherine settled it with our late sainted Superior, and I think even they are beginning to repent a little, for they were talking only this morning of all the expense we have had lately."

"Poor child," murmured Sœur Lucie, who had no unkindly feelings towards her little charge, "there is surely enough for one more."

"That is all very well, *ma Sœur*, but an extra person is an extra person, as we all know. We might keep the child for a time out of charity, but when there is a question of her taking the vows, and living here always, it is another matter altogether. It has not been the custom in our house to receive sisters without *dots*, and it will never

do—never; but of course our sainted mother knew best, and my opinion was not asked, though it might have been as well worth having as that of some others."

"Poor child," said good little Sœur Lucie again, looking towards the bed; "and she has improved very much lately, don't you think so, *ma Sœur?*"

"Oh, yes, she has improved, no doubt; it would be astonishing if she had not, after being here more than two years; but that is not the question. However, I must be going," she added, "I have a hundred things to do before vespers. And the border for that altar cloth will be ready by the end of the month, you think?"

"I hope so," answered Sœur Lucie. "Madelon shall help me as soon as she is strong enough again; she can embroider quite nicely now."

"So much the better; she will have to do

plenty by-and-by, and make herself useful if she is to stay here."

Sœur Ursule left the room as she spoke, and Sœur Lucie, with her knitting in her lap, sat meditating in the darkness. Presently a restless movement in the bed roused her. "Are you awake, Madelon?" she said softly.

No answer, only another toss, and a sort of long sigh. Sœur Lucie rose, lighted a candle, measured out some medicine, and then with the glass in one hand, and the light in the other, she came to the bedside. Madelon was lying with her back towards her, her arms flung over her head, her face buried in the pillow. She did not move, and Sœur Lucie touched her gently.

"It is time to take your medicine, *mon enfant*," she said.

Madelon turned round then, and taking the glass, drank off the contents without a

word; as she gave it back to the nun, something in her face or expression, fairly startled the little sister.

"Why, whatever is the matter, *mon enfant?*" she cried, "you must have been dreaming, I think."

"No, I have not been dreaming," answered Madelon; and then, as the nun turned away to put down the glass and candle on the table, she caught hold of her gown with all the strength of which her feeble fingers were capable.

"Don't go, please don't go, Sœur Lucie," she said, "I want to speak to you."

"In a moment; I am not going," answered the sister. "Well, what is it, *ma petite?*" she added, coming back to the bedside.

"What—what was it Sœur Ursule was saying to you just now?" asks Madelon.

"Just now!" cried Sœur Lucie, taken aback; "why I thought you were asleep."

"No, I was not asleep," Madelon answered, "I only had my eyes shut."

"But that is very naughty, *mon enfant*, to pretend to be asleep when you are awake."

"I didn't pretend," said Madelon aggrieved, "only I hadn't opened my eyes, and I could not help hearing what you said."

"Ah well, if you heard, there is no use in my telling you," says Sœur Lucie, who was not at all above using that imperfect, but irrefragable, logic familiar to us from our nurseries; "so you had better go to sleep again, for I cannot stop here any longer. Let me smoothe your pillow."

"No," said Madelon, escaping from her hands with an impatient toss. "Ah, don't go away yet," she added piteously. "Was it true what Sœur Ursule said about me?"

"About you, *mon enfant?*"

"Yes, about me—that I was to become a nun."

"Ah!" said Sœur Lucie, with the air of being suddenly enlightened, "yes—yes, I suppose so, since she said it. Now I must go, and do you go to sleep."

"No, no," cried Madelon raising herself in the bed and stretching out both arms after Sœur Lucie's retreating figure. "Ah, Sœur Lucie, don't leave me. I can't be a nun; don't let them make me a nun!"

There was something so pitiful and beseeching in her accent, something so frail-looking in the little, white, imploring hands, that Sœur Lucie's heart was touched. She came back again.

"*Ecoutes*, Madelon," she said, "you will be ill again to-morrow if you talk so much; lie down now, and tell me what it is you want. No one is going to make you a nun now, you know."

"No, not now, but by-and-by. Is it true that Aunt Thérèse said I was to be made one?"

"Yes, that is true enough, I believe; but there is nothing to be unhappy about in that," answered Sœur Lucie, who naturally looked at things from a different point of view than Madelon's. "There are many girls who would be glad of such a chance; for you see, *mon enfant*, it is only because nothing could be refused to our late sainted Superior, that it has been arranged at all."

"Sœur Ursule said I should be a burthen," answered Madelon. "I don't want to be a burthen; I only want to go away. Ah! why do you keep me? I am miserable here; I always have been, and I always shall be—always."

"But that is foolish," replied Sœur Lucie, "for you will be very happy—far happier than you could ever be out in the world,

ma petite; it is full of snares, and temptations, and wickedness, that never can come near us here. Look at me; I was no older than you when I first came here, and never has girl been happier, I believe. No, no, Madelon," she went on, with a good-natured wish to make things pleasant, "you will stay with us, and be our child, and we will take care of you."

"I don't want you to take care of me!" cries Madelon, the burning tears starting painfully to her eyes. "I hate convents, and I hate nuns, and it is wicked and cruel to keep me here!"

"Am I cruel and wicked? Do you hate me?" said Sœur Lucie, rather aggrieved in her turn.

"No, no," cried Madelon with compunction, and throwing her arms round Sœur Lucie's neck; "you are very kind, Sœur Lucie, and you won't let them make me a

nun, will you? You will tell them all that I should be miserable——ah! I should die, I know I should!"

"Well, well, we will not talk about it any more to-night. As for me, I have nothing to do with it—nothing; but I cannot have you make yourself ill with chattering; so now let me put your pillow straight, and then you must go to sleep as fast as you can."

With a final shake of the pillow and arrangement of the bed-clothes, Sœur Lucie went away, leaving Madelon, not to sleep, but to lie broad awake, framing the most dismal little pictures of the future. And was this to be the end of it all, then?—the end of her vague dreams, her undefined hopes, which, leaping over a dim space of intervening years, had rested on a future of indefinite brightness lying somewhere outside these convent walls? Ah, was all indeed at an end? Never to pass these dull

walls again, never to see anything but these dreary rooms,—all her life to be one unvarying, relentless routine, day after day, year after year—to be forced to teach stupid children, like Sœur Ursule, or to make jam and embroider altar-cloths, like Sœur Lucie, to say such long prayers, and to wear such ugly dresses, thinks poor Madelon, with a queer jumble of the duties and obligations of a nun's life. Ah! what would be the use of getting well and strong again, if that were all that life had in store for her? "Why did I not die?" thinks the poor child, tossing restlessly from side to side. "I wish I was dead! Ah! why did I not die? I wish I had never been born!" To her, as to all inexperienced minds, life appeared as a series of arbitrary events, rather than as a chain of dependent circumstances ceaselessly modifying each other, and she could not conceive the possibility of any gradual change

of position being brought about in the slow course of years. The long succession of grey, weary days, which she had lately taught herself to consider as a path that must be traversed, but which would still lead ultimately to a future of most supreme happiness, suddenly seemed to terminate in a grave black as death itself, from which there could be no escape. "If papa were here," thinks Madelon, "he would never allow it; he would never leave me here in this horrible place, he would take me away. Oh! papa, papa, why did you die?" And burying her face in the pillow, she began to sob and cry in her weakness and despair.

But this last thought of her father had suggested a new set of ideas and memories to Madelon, and by-and-by she stopped crying, and began to think again, confusedly at first, but presently with a more definite purpose gradually forming itself in the dark-

ness of her bewildered thoughts. Had she not promised her father never to become a nun? Perhaps he had thought of something like this happening, and that was why he had made her promise, and of course she must keep her word. But how is she to do that? wonders Madelon. If Monsieur Horace were here, indeed, he might help her. Ah, if Monsieur Horace were but here! Should she write to him, and tell him how unhappy she was, and ask him to come and take her away? He had given her his English address, and told her to be sure and let him know, if she were in any trouble, or wanted any help. "But then," thinks our foolish little Madelon, with the most quixotic notions busy in her tired little brain, "I have not done what I said I would, and he will think, perhaps, I want to break my word." Alas, must that grand surprise that was to have been prepared for him, all

those fine schemes, and plans, and projects, must they all fall to the ground? Was she never, never to show him how much she loved him? And yet, if they made her a nun, how could she do it all? He would never have his fortune made then, though she had promised to do it, and he would think she had forgotten him, and cared nothing about him. So wearily did Madelon's mind revolve, dwelling most of all on that promise made so long ago; and as she realized the possibility of her never being able to fulfil it at all, she became possessed with a feverish desire to get up that very moment and set about it. If—if—ah, supposing she were to run away—Aunt Thérèse is not here now, and she would not be afraid of the other nuns finding her, she would hide herself too well for that—supposing she were to run away, go to Spa, make the fortune, and then write to Monsieur

Horace? Would not that be an idea?

When Sœur Lucie came in an hour later, to look after Madelon, she found her fast asleep; the traces of tears were still on her cheeks, and the pillow and bedclothes were all disarranged and tossed about again, but she was lying quite quietly now. Sœur Lucie stood for a moment, looking down upon the child's white face, that had grown so small and thin. Her hair had been all cut off during her illness, and curled in soft brown rings all over her head, as when she was a little child, and indeed there was something most childlike in the peaceful little face, which had a look of repose that it seldom wore when the wistful brown eyes were open, with their expression of always longing and seeking for something beyond their ken. Somehow Sœur Lucie was touched with a sudden feeling of unwonted tenderness for her little charge. "*Pauvre*

petite," she murmured, gently raising one hand that hung over the side of the bed, and smoothing back a stray lock of hair. Madelon opened her eyes for a moment, "Monsieur Horace," she said, "I have not forgotten, I—I will——" and then she turned away and fell sound asleep again.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RED SILK PURSE.

IT was about three weeks later, that Madelon was sitting one evening at her bedroom window; it was open, and the breeze blew in pleasantly, bringing with it the faint scent of early roses and lingering violets. In the garden below, lengthening shadows fell across the cherished centre square of grass, the trees were all golden-green in the western sunlight; black-veiled Sisters were walking about breaking the stillness with their voices and laughter; along the convent wall the vines were shooting and spreading their long tender sprays,

and on the opposite side a great westeria was shedding showers of lilac blossoms with every breath of wind amongst the shrubs and evergreens below.

Madelon, sitting forward on her chair, her chin propped on her hands, her embroidery lying in her lap, saw and heeded none of these things; her eyes were fixed dreamily on the sky, but her thoughts were by no means dreamy, very intent rather upon one idea which she was endeavouring to rescue from the region of dreams and vagueness, and set before her with a distinctness that should ensure a practical result. This idea, which indeed was no new one, but simply that of running away from the convent, which had first occurred to her three weeks before, had presented itself with more assurance to her mind during every day of her convalescence; and now that she was nearly well again, it was fast becoming

an unalterable resolution. There were difficulties in the way—she was considering them now—but she knew she should be able to overcome them; we say advisedly; she *knew* it, for the child already recognized in herself an unwavering strength of mind and purpose, which assured her that no foreseen obstacles could stand between her and any fixed end that she proposed to herself; as for unforseen ones—our small-experienced Madelon did not take them into account at all.

It was not that she was a prodigy compounded of nothing but firmness, and resolution, and obstinacy, this little slender girl, who sat there in the evening sunlight, puzzling out her plan; there were plenty of weak points in her character, which would perhaps make themselves sufficiently apparent in years to come. But these at least she possessed —a persistency of purpose in whatever she un-

dertook, on which she could confidently rely, and a certain courage and independence that promised to carry her successfully through all difficulties; and these things are, I think, as the charmed cakes that the Princess carried to the enchanted castle, and wherewith she tamed the great lions that tried to oppose her entrance. Madelon sees before her a very fair enchanted castle, lying outside these convent walls—even something like a Prince to rescue—and she will not fail to provide herself with such charms as lie within her reach, to appease any possible menagerie that may be lying between her and it.

She had already sketched out a little scheme whereby she might redeem the two promises which, lying latent in her mind for these two years past, had suddenly sprung into such abnormal activity, and, in the limited circle of her small past, present and

future, monopolized at once her memories, and energies, and hopes. She must get out of the convent—that was evidently the first thing to be done; and this safely accomplished, the path of action seemed tolerably clear. She would make her way to Spa, which, as she well knew, was not far off, and go to an hotel there, which her father had frequented a good deal, and where there was a good-natured landlady, who had always petted and made much of the little lonely child. Once at Spa—but here Madelon's plans assumed a bright and dazzling aspect, which, undimmed by any prophetic mist, unshaded by any foreboding cloud, almost deprived them of that distinctness so requisite for their calm and impartial consideration. All the difficulties seemed to lie on the road between the convent and the Redoute at Spa; once there, there could be no doubt but that this fortune, which she was

pledged in her poor little foolish idea to obtain, would be made in no time at all. She could perfectly figure to herself the piles of notes and gold that would flow in upon her; and how she would then write to Monsieur Horace at the address he had given her; and then—Madelon had in her own mind a distinct little picture of herself, pouring out a bag of gold at Monsieur Horace's feet, with a little discourse, which there was still time enough to compose!

But it could not be denied that there were two formidable obstacles standing between her and this so brilliant consummation; first, that she was not yet out of the convent, and that there was no perfectly obvious means of getting out; secondly, that she had no money. The former of these objections did not, however, appear absolutely insurmountable. Just beneath her window the wall was covered with a tangle

of vines, and jessamine, and climbing roses; to a slim active child, with an unalterable purpose, the descent of even twenty feet of wall with so much friendly assistance might have seemed not unfeasible; but, in fact, Madelon's window was raised hardly ten feet above the flower-bed below. Once in the garden, there was, as in most old garden walls, a corner where certain displaced bricks would afford a sufficient footing, aided by the wide-spreading branches of the great westeria, and the tough shoots of clinging ivy. The wall was not high; what might be its aspect on the other side she was not certain, though she had an unpleasant haunting memory of a smooth, whitewashed surface; but once on the top, it would be hard indeed if she could not get down; and then, as she knew, there was only a field to be crossed, and she would find herself in the high road leading from Liége to Chaud-

fontaine, and so through Pepinster to Spa.

No, getting out of the convent was not the difficulty. It would be easier, certainly, if one could walk out at the front door; but this being a possibility not to be calculated upon, two walls should not stand in the way. The real problem, of which even Madelon's sanguine mind saw no present solution, was how to get on without money, or rather how to procure any. She had none, not even a centime, and she was well aware that her fortune could in no wise be procured without some small invested capital; and besides, how was she to get to Spa at all without money? Could she walk there? Her ideas of the actual distance were too vague for her to make such a plan with any certainty; and besides, the chances of her discovery and capture by the nuns (chances too horribly unpleasing, and involving too many unknown consequences

for Madelon to contemplate them with anything but a shudder), would be multiplied indefinitely by so slow a method of proceeding. Certainly this question of money was a serious one, and it was this that Madelon was revolving, as she sat gazing at the golden sunset sky, when she was startled by a sudden rumbling and tumbling in the corridor; in another moment the door was burst open, and Sœur Lucie and another sister appeared, dragging between them a corded trunk, of the most secular appearance, which had apparently seen many places, for it was pasted all over with half effaced addresses and illustrated hotel advertisements.

Madelon gave a little cry and sprang forward; she knew the box well, and had brought it with her to Liége, but had never seen it since then till to-day. It was like a little bit of her former life suddenly revived,

and rescued from the past years with which so much was buried.

"This is yours apparently, Madeleine," said Sœur Lucie, her broad, good-humoured face illumined with a smile at the child's eagerness; "the sight of it has done you good, I think; it is long since you have looked so gay."

"Yes, it is mine," cried Madelon; "where has it been all this time, Sœur Lucie?"

"Sœur Marie and I were clearing out a room downstairs, and we found it pushed away in a corner, so we thought we had better bring it up for you to see what is in it."

"I know," said Madelon, "it was a trunk of mamma's; there are some things of hers put away in it, I think. I never saw them, for we did not take it about with us everywhere; but I brought it with me from

Paris, and I suppose Aunt Thérèse put it away."

"Our sainted Superior doubtless knew best," said Sœur Lucie with a ready faith, which was capable, however, of adjusting itself to meet altered circumstances, "but we are clearing out that room below, which we think of turning into another store-room; we have not half space enough for our confitures as it is, and another large order has arrived to-day. And so, Madeleine, we had better see if there is anything in the box you wish to keep, and then it can be sent away. We shall perhaps find some clothes that can be altered for you."

"Yes," said Madelon, on whom, in spite of her new schemes and resolutions, that little sentence about sending the box away had a chilling effect; it was like cutting off another link between her and the world.

Sœur Lucie went down on her knees and began to uncord the trunk.

"Here is the key tied to it," she said; "now we shall see."

She raised the lid as she spoke, but at that moment a bell began to ring.

"That is for vespers," she cried, "we must go; Madeleine, in a few days you will be able to come to the chapel again; to-night you can stay and take out these things. Ah, just as I thought—there are clothes," she added, taking a hurried peep, and then following Sœur Marie out of the room.

Madelon approached the box with a certain awe mixed with her curiosity. It was quite true that she had never seen what it contained; she only knew that it had been her mother's, and that various articles belonging to her had been put away in it after her death. It had never been opened since, to her knowledge; her father had once told her that she

might have the contents one day when she was a big girl, but that was all she knew about it.

Madelon had no very keen emotion respecting the mother she had never known; her father had spoken of her so seldom, and everything in connection with her had so completely dropped out of sight, that there had been no scope for the imaginative, shadowy adoration with which children who have early lost their mother are wont to regard her memory; her father had been everything to her, and of her mother's brother she had none but unpleasant recollections. But now, for the first time, she was brought face to face with something that had actually been her mother's, and it was with a sort of instinctive reverence that she went up to the box and took out one thing after another. There was some faint scent pervading them all, which ever afterwards as-

sociated itself in Madelon's mind with that hour in the narrow room and gathering twilight.

There was nothing, apparently, of the smallest value in the trunk. Any trinkets that Madame Linders might once have possessed had been parted with long before her death; and anything else that seemed likely to produce money had been sold afterwards. Here were nothing but linen clothes, which, as Sœur Lucie had hinted, might be made available for Madelon; a shawl, and a cloak of an old-fashioned pattern, a few worn English books, with the name "Magdalen Moore" written on the fly leaf, at which Madelon looked curiously; a half empty workbox, and two or three gowns. Amongst these last was a well-worn black silk, lying almost at the bottom of the trunk; and Madelon, taking it out, unfolded it with some satisfaction at the thought of seeing

it transformed into a garment for herself. As she did so, she perceived that some things had been left in the pocket. It had probably been the last gown worn by Madame Linders, and after her death, in the hurry and confusion that had attended the packing away of her things, under Monsieur Linders' superintendence, it had been put away with the rest without examination.

A cambric handkerchief was the first thing Madelon pulled out, and, as she did so, a folded paper fluttered on to the ground. She picked it up, and took it to the window to examine it. It was the fragment of a half-burnt letter, a half sheet of foreign paper closely written in a small, clear hand; but only a fragment, for there was neither beginning nor ending. It was in English, but Madelon remembered enough of the language to make out the meaning, and this was what she read in the fading light.

It began abruptly thus:—

" . . . cannot come to me, and that I must not come to you, that it would do no good, and that M. Linders would not like it. Well, I must submit, I suppose, but if you could imagine, Magdalen, how I long to see your face, to hear your voice again! It is hard to be parted for so long, and I weary, oh, how I weary for you sometimes. To think that you are unhappy, and that I cannot comfort you; that you also sometimes wish for me, and that I cannot come to you—all this seems at times very hard to bear. I think sometimes that to die for those we love would be too easy a thing; to suffer for them and with them—would not that be better? And I do suffer with you in my heart—do you not believe it? But of what good is it? it cannot remove one pang or lighten your burthen for a single moment. This is folly, you will say;

well, perhaps it is; you know I like to be sentimental sometimes, and I am in just such a mood to-night. Is it folly too to say, that after all the years since we parted I still miss you? and yet so it is. Sometimes, sitting by the fire of an evening, or looking out at the twilight garden, I seem to hear a voice and a step, and half expect to see my pretty Maud—you tell me you are altered, but I cannot realize it, and yet, of course, you must be; we are both growing old women now—we two girls will never meet again. Don't laugh at me if I tell you a dream I had last night; I dreamt that. . ." Below these words the page had been destroyed, but there was more writing on the other side, and Madelon read on:

". . . no doubt tired of all this about my love and regrets and sympathy, and you have heard it all before, have you not? Only believe it, Magdalen, for it comes from

my heart. I think sometimes from your letters that you doubt it, that you doubt me; never do that—trust me when I say that my love for you is a part of myself, that can only end with life and consciousness. Well, let us talk of something else. I am so glad to hear that your baby thrives; it was good of you to wish to give it my name, but your husband was quite right in saying it should be called Madeleine after you, and I shall love it all the better. I already feel as if I had a possession in it, and if big Maud will not come to me, why then I shall have to put up with little Maud, and insist on her coming to pay me a visit some day. But you must come too, Magdalen; your room is all ready for you, it has been prepared ever since I came into this house, and if I could see your baby in the little empty bed in my nursery I think it would take away some of the heart-

ache that looking at it gives me. I am writing a dismal letter instead of a cheery one, such as I ought to send you in your solitude; but the rain it is raining, and the wind it is blowing, and when all looks so gray and forlorn outside, one is apt to be haunted by the sound of small feet and chattering voices; you also, do you not know what that is? I am alone too, to-day, for Hor . . ."

Here the sentence broke off abruptly; the edges of the paper were all charred and brown; one could fancy that the letter had been condemned to the flames, and then that this page had been rescued, as if the possessor could not bear to part with all the loving words.

It was like a sigh from the past. Still holding the paper in her hand, Madelon leant her head against the window-frame and looked out. The sun had set, the trees

were blowing about, black against the clear pale yellow of the evening sky, overhead stars were shining faintly here and there, the wind was sighing and scattering the faint-scented petals of the over-blown roses. Half unconsciously, Madelon felt that the scene, the hour, were in harmony with the pathos of the brown, faded words, like a chord struck in unison with the key-note of a mournful song. As she gazed, the tears began to gather in her eyes; she tried to read the letter again, and the big drops fell on the paper, already stained with other tears that had been dried ever so many years ago. But it was already too dark, she could hardly see the words; she laid the paper down and began to cry.

It was not the first part of the letter that moved her so much, though there was something in her that responded to the devoted, loving words; but she had not the

key to their meaning. She knew nothing of her mother's life, nor of her causes for unhappiness; and for the moment she did not draw the inferences that to an older and more experienced person would have been at once obvious. It was the allusion to herself that was making Madelon cry with a tender little self-pity. The child was so weary of the convent, was feeling so friendless and so homeless just then, that this mention of the little empty bed that sometime and somewhere had been prepared and waiting to receive her, awoke in her quite a new longing, such as she had never had before, for a home and a mother, and kind protection and care like other children. When at last she folded the letter up, it was to put it carefully away in the little box that contained her few treasures. It belonged to a life in which she somehow felt she had some part, though it lay below the

horizon of her own memories and consciouness.

Only then, as Madelon prepared to put back the things that she had taken out of the trunk, did it occur to her to look if anything else remained in the pocket of the black silk gown. There was not much—only a half-used pencil, a small key, and a faded red silk netted purse. There was money in this last—at one end a few sous and about six francs in silver, at the other, twenty francs in gold.

CHAPTER X.

OUT OF THE CONVENT.

"I THINK you might very well come down to vespers to-night, *mon enfant*," said Sœur Lucie one evening about a week later.

"To-night!" said Madelon, starting.

"Yes; why not? You are quite well and strong enough now, and we must set to work again. I think you have been idle long enough, and we can't begin better than by your coming to chapel this evening."

Madelon was silent and dismayed. Ever since she had found the money, her project of flight had become a question of time only,

and it was precisely this hour of vespers she had fixed on as the only one possible for her escape; the nuns would all be in the chapel, and once outside the convent, the increasing darkness would favour her.

"Ah, not to-night, Sœur Lucie, please," she said in a faltering voice. "I—I am tired—I have been in the garden all the afternoon——that is, I am not tired, but I don't want to come down to-night."

"Well, I will let you off this one evening," said Sœur Lucie good-naturedly; "though you used to be fond of coming to vespers, and certainly I don't think you can be very tired with sitting in the garden. However, we must begin work regularly to-morrow, so you had better go to bed at once and get well rested. Good night, *ma petite.*"

"Good night," said Madelon; and then, as Sœur Lucie turned to leave the room, she felt a sudden pang of self-reproach.

She was deceiving the good-humoured, simple little sister, who had been kind to her after her own fashion; and she was going away, and would never see her any more. She thought she would like to have one more kind word from her, as she could not wish her good-bye.

"Do you love me, Sœur Lucie?" she said, flinging her arms round her neck.

"To be sure, *mon enfant*," answers Sœur Lucie, with some astonishment; then hastening to add the qualifying clause by which so many worthy people take care to proclaim that their love is human and not divine, "that is, when you are good, you know, and do what you are told."

"Ah," said Madelon, relaxing her hold, "then if I were to do something you thought very naughty you would not love me any more?"

"Indeed I don't know; you are not

going to be naughty, I hope?" answered the nun; "but I can't wait any longer now—make haste and go to bed quietly."

She hurried out of the room as she spoke. Madelon listened till the sound of her footsteps died away, and then, without a moment's further pause, or hesitation, began putting together a few things into a small bundle. She had no time to waste in vain regrets; what she had to do must be done quickly, or not at all. A dozen windows overlooked the garden, and presently the nuns would be returning to their cells, and her chances would be over. Even now it was possible that one or another might have been detained from the chapel, but that she must risk; better that, she thought, than to wait till later, when a prolonged vigil or a wakeful sister might be the cause of frustrating all her hopes and plans. She had no fear of her flight being discovered before the morn-

ing. Since her illness she had always gone to bed early, and Sœur Lucie never did anything more than put her head in at the door, on her way to her own room which was in a different part of the building, to see that all was dark and quiet; and if Madelon did not speak, would go away at once, satisfied that she was asleep.

The chapel bell was still ringing as she went swiftly about her few preparations, but it had ceased by the time the small bundle was made up, and Madelon, in her hat and cloak, stood ready to depart. She had laid all her plans in her own mind, and knew exactly what she meant to do. She had decided that she would walk to Chaudfontaine; she knew that she had only to follow the high road to get there, and the distance she thought could not be very great, for she remembered having once walked it with her father years ago. To be sure she had been

very tired, but she had been only a little girl then, and could do much better now; and it appeared to her this would be simpler and better than going into Liége to find the railway station, of whose situation she had no very distinct idea, and where she might have to wait all night for a train, thus doubling her chances of detection. She would rather walk the five or six miles to Chaudfontaine during the night, and take the first morning train to Pepinster and Spa; once there, there could of course be no further difficulties.

She stood at the window now, ready to take the first step. She had on the old black silk gown, in which Sœur Lucie's skilful fingers had already made the necessary alterations, a black cloth cloak, and a little round hat and veil. She had grown a good deal during her illness, and the idea of height was aided by the straight black skirt,

which, reaching to her ankles, gave her a quaint old-fashioned air. She had her bundle on her arm, but there was still a moment of irresolution, as she looked for the last time round the little whitewashed room. It appeared to her that she was going to do something so dreadfully naughty. Our Madelon had not lived so long in a convent atmosphere, without imbibing some of the convent ideas and opinions, and she was aware that in the eyes of the nuns there were few offences so heinous as that which she was going to commit. "But I am not a nun yet," thinks the poor child, clasping and unclasping her hands in her perplexity, and struggling with the conscience-stricken sense of naughtiness, which threatened at this last moment to overpower all her foregone conclusions, and disconcert her in spite of herself—"I am not a nun yet, so it cannot be so very wrong in me; and then there is Mon-

sieur Horace—" and with the thought of him all Madelon's courage returned. The rush of associations linking his name with a hundred aspirations, hopes, plans, which had become a habit of mind with her, revived in full force, and with these came a sudden realization of the imminent nature of the present opportunity, which, if lost, might never return.

The next moment she had dropped her bundle on the flower-bed below, and was scrambling out of the low window, clinging to the window-sill, catching hold of tough stems and pliant branches, crashing down through twigs, and leaves, and flowers, on to the ground beneath. Could these convent-trained vines and roses have known what daring little culprit was amongst them, would they have cried aloud for aid, I wonder, stretching out thorny sprays, and twining tendrils, to catch and detain her prisoner?—

or would they not rather, in their sweet liberty of air, and dew, and sunshine, have done their best to help forward this poor little captive in her flight, aiding her in her descent, and shielding her from all prying eyes with their leafy branches, their interlacing sprays of red buds, and soft, faint flowers?

But they paid no heed one way or the other, and Madelon, with not a few scratches on her hands, and more than one rent in her frock, was safely on the ground. It was all the work of a moment; in another she had caught up her bundle, and was darting over the lawn, across the twilit garden, as if the whole sisterhood were in pursuit. Hardly knowing how she did it, she clambered up the wall, through the big westeria, reached the top, and slipping, sliding, found herself in the pathway running round the outside, scratched, bruised, and breathless, but with-

out the walls, and so far free, at any rate. Months afterwards she found some withered lilac-blossoms lodged amongst the ribbons of her hat; how they recalled to her the moment of that desperate rush and clamber, the faint, dewy scent of the flowers, which she noticed even then, the rustle and crash of the branches, which startled her as with the sound of pursuing footsteps.

Once outside, she paused for a moment to take breath, and be certain that no one was following her. All was quiet, and in the stillness she could hear, as once before, the voices of the nuns singing in the chapel. Picking up her bundle again, she walked quickly away, along the little weed-grown path at the back of the building, down the slope of the ploughed field, up which she had come with Horace Graham two years and a half ago. In thinking over her journey beforehand, she had decided that it

would be unwise to be walking along the high road whilst there was still any daylight left, and that she would hide herself somewhere till it should be quite dark, before setting out on her walk to Chaudfontaine. So, as soon as she had reached the bottom of the unsheltered slope, she looked about for a place of refuge. She found it in a clump of trees and bushes growing by the roadside; and creeping in amongst them, our Madelon's slim little figure was very well concealed amongst the shadows from any passers-by. Eight o'clock had struck as she left the convent. "I will wait till nine," she resolved. "An hour will not be very long, and it will be quite dark by that time." And so she did wait, with the most determined impatient patience, through an hour that seemed as if it would never end, whilst the darkness fell, and passing footsteps became more and more rare. At last she heard the shrill-

toned convent clock strike nine, and coming out of her place of concealment, she began her journey in earnest.

It was a dark, still, cloudy night. Above was the black mass of the convent dimly defined against the sullen sky; she took one glance at it before she bade it farewell; all was silent, not a light shone from its windows, not a tree waved above the surrounding walls. Behind her hung the great cloud of smoke that ever darkens over the city of Liége. Here and there a sudden glare illuminated the gloom of the surrounding hills; it came from the furnaces of the great iron foundries; before her stretched the dusky road, between hedges and trees and scattered houses, soon lost in the obscurity beyond. Not a footstep could be heard, not a leaf rustled as Madelon and her bundle emerged from their hiding-place; but the child felt no alarm at the silence and solitude—the dark-

ness and loneliness of the road could not frighten her. Indeed she was naturally of so courageous a temperament, and just then, through joy and hope, of so brave a spirit, that it would have been only a very real and present danger that could have alarmed her, and she did not even dream of imaginary ones. She almost danced as she went along, she felt so free and happy. "How glad I am to have quitted the convent," she thought to herself; "how *triste* it was, how dismal! How can people exist who always, always live there? They do not live, I think, they seem half-dead already. Aunt Thérèse, how mournful and cold she always looked; she never smiled, she hardly ever spoke, she was not alive as other people are. Sœur Lucie told me that she would be a glorious saint in Heaven, and ten thousand times more happy than if she had not lived in the convent; how does

Sœur Lucie know, I wonder? If so, she must have been glad to die—it was, perhaps, for that, that she made herself so miserable, that she might not dread death when it came; but that seems to me a very foolish way of spending one's life. And if to be like Aunt Thérèse was to be a saint, I am sure all the nuns were not so. How they used to chatter and quarrel sometimes; Sœur Marie would hardly speak to Sœur Lucie for a week, I remember, because she said Sœur Lucie had made Aunt Thérèse give her the best piece of embroidery to do, after it had been promised to her. I do not believe that; I love Sœur Lucie, she was always kind to me, and never quarrelled with anyone. Oh! even if I had not made that promise to papa, I could never, never, have been a nun; I have done well in running away."

She walked on for a long time, her

thoughts running on the scenes she had left behind, on the last two years of her life; she had no remorse now, no regrets at their having come to an end. To our lively, independent, excitable Madelon, they had, as we know, been years of restraint, of penance, of utter weariness; and never, perhaps, had she felt them to be so more keenly than in these first moments of her release. But she would have found them harder still without the memory of Monsieur Horace, and her promise to him, to fill her heart and imagination, and her thoughts reverted to him now; how, when she had made his fortune, she would take it all to him; how he would look, what he would say. This was a little picture the child was never weary of imagining to herself. She filled it in with a hundred different backgrounds, to suit the fancy of the moment; she tinted it with the brightest colours. Out in the vague future,

into which no one can venture to look without some point on which to rest the mind, this little scene had gradually become at once the end of her present hopes, the beginning of another life, of which, indeed, she knew nothing, but that it lay in a sort of luminous haze of success and happiness. She never doubted she would attain it; it was not an affair of the imagination only, it was to be a most certain reality; she had arranged it all in those long weeks gone by, and now that the beginning was actually made, she was ready to look at it from the most practical point of view. Taking out her little purse, she began to count her money for at least the fiftieth time, as she walked along in the darkness.

"I have here twenty-six francs," she said to herself; "out of these, I must pay my journey to Spa. Why should I not go to Spa on foot? It cannot be a very long way; I re-

member that papa sometimes went backwards and forwards twice in the day from Chaudfontaine. I have already come a great way, and I am not in the least fatigued. If I could do that, I should save a great deal of money—not that I am afraid I shall not have plenty without that; ten francs would be sufficient, but it will be perhaps safer if I can keep fifteen. Let me see; I must pay for my room at Spa. I wonder whether Madame Bertrand is still the landlady at the Hôtel de Madrid. Also I must have some breakfast and some dinner; all this, however, will not cost me ten francs. I imagine I could still take the train from Chaudfontaine to Spa. Ah, I am getting very tired; I wonder if I have much further to go. I think I must rest a little while."

Madelon, in fact, but lately recovered from her fever, and for many months unused to much exercise, was in no sort of

condition for a six or seven miles' walk. She had started with great courage, but it seemed to her that she had already been on her journey quite an indefinite length of time, and that she must be near the end, whilst in fact she had only accomplished half the distance. She would sit down for a short time, she thought, and then the rest would soon be accomplished, and she looked about for a seat of some kind. The road hitherto could hardly have been called lonely, for houses had been scattered on either side, and part of the way had led through a large village, where, from some uncurtained window, from some café or restaurant, long gleams of light had shot across the road, revealing for an instant the little figure passing swiftly along, glad to hide again in the obscurity beyond. But all this was left behind now, and as far as she could make out, she was quite

in the open country, though in the darkness she could hardly distinguish objects three yards off. She found a big stone however before long, and sitting down on it, leaning her head against a tree, in five minutes the child was soundly asleep.

How long she slept she never knew. Tired out, her repose was at first profound, and unconscious; but presently it began to be haunted by confused dreams, in which past, present, and future were mingled together. She dreamt that she was wandering in some immense vaulted hall, where she had never been before, and which yet resembled the refectory at the convent; for long tables were spread as for the evening meal, and in the twilight, black-robed nuns whose faces she could never see, were gliding to and fro. And then, how or why she did not know, they were no longer the deal

tables of the convent, with their coarse white cloths and earthenware plates, but the long green tables of the Kursaal, with Aunt Thérèse as croupier, and all the nuns pushing and raking the piles of money backwards and forwards. She was amongst them, and it seemed to her she had just won a great heap of gold, but when she tried to get it, Aunt Thérèse, in the character of croupier, refused to let her touch it. "It is mine; is it not, papa?" she cried to somebody standing at her side; and then looking up, saw it was Monsieur Horace; he did not speak, but gazing at her for a moment, shook his head, and moved away slowly into the gloom. And then the nuns and Aunt Thérèse also seemed to vanish, and she was left alone with the tables and the money, in the midst of which lay a long figure covered with a sheet, as she had seen her father the night that he had died. She

did not think of that, however, but ran eagerly up to the table to take her winnings, when the figure moved, a hand was put out to seize the gold, and the sheet falling off, Madelon recognized her dead father's face.

With a shriek she awoke, and sprang up, shivering and trembling with cold and fright —all the terrors of the night suddenly come upon her. She looked round; all was as it had been when she went to sleep; the lonely road, the dark fields, the trees and hedges; but a breeze had sprung up before the dawn, and was rustling the leaves and branches; overhead a star or two was shining in dark rifts, and in the east a melancholy waning moon was slowly rising, half obscured by scattered clouds. With a sudden impulse, born of an urgent sense of utter loneliness and helplessness, the child fell on her knees and repeated an Ave Maria; the

clouds drifted away, and the low moon shone out between the trees with a pale glow, that to our convent-taught Madelon seemed suddenly to irradiate and transfigure the night with a glory not of earth. Never in after years did she, in church or picture-gallery, come across glorified Madonna, or saint floating in ethereal spaces, without the memory returning to her of a silent road, dark, rustling trees, a midnight sky swept with clouds; and then a vision, as it were, of light and hope, giving new strength and courage to one little terrified heart.

Madelon started on her journey with renewed energy, but she hardly knew how she got through the miles that remained. The moon rose higher and higher, the road bordered with poplar trees seemed to stretch before and behind into a never-ending length, as in some wearying nightmare. Madelon, in her straight, old-fashioned silk

frock, her bundle on her arm, marching steadily on, looked nothing but a queer little black speck, casting a long narrow shadow, as she passed from one moonlit space to another. Ever afterwards, when she looked back upon that night, the whole seemed like some perplexed, struggling dream, of which the waking reality appeared less vivid than the visions that had haunted her sleep. Perhaps she would have broken down altogether but for the friendly hints of the coming day that presently began to show themselves. There came a moment when the night grew more silent, and the breeze more chilly, and the surrounding world more dim and fantastic in the uncertain moonlight; and then the shadows began to waver and grow confused, long streaks of light showed themselves in the east, the moon grew fainter in the brightening sky, the birds began to chirp and twitter in every

tree and bush. The night had vanished, and the horizon was all aglow with the ruddy light of a new day, when Madelon turned the last bend of the road, and saw before her the white cottages, the big hotel, the stream and hills of Chaudfontaine.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COUNTESS G——.

NO one was yet stirring in the little village, which, scarcely emerged from the early twilight, lay still and silent, except for the ceaseless, monotonous clang of the forges. Madelon was tired out; she knew it was too early for any train to start for Spa, and nothing better occurred to her than to sit down and rest once more in a sheltered corner amongst some bushes under a big hawthorn tree growing on the bank of the river; and in a few minutes she was again sound asleep, whilst the mass of snowy blossoms above her head grew rosy in the sunlight.

It was broad daylight when she awoke

again, and sat up rubbing her eyes, and feeling very chilly, and stiff, and sleepy, but with a quickly succeeding delight in the bright May morning, a joyous sense of escape and freedom, of all that she had accomplished already, and was going to accomplish on this day to which she had looked forward so long. Everything looked gold and blue in the early sunlight; the river danced and sparkled, the poplar trees were now green, now silvery-grey as they waved about in the breeze; the country people were passing along the road, laughing and chattering gaily in their queer *patois*. The dark night seemed to have vanished into indefinite remoteness, like some incongruous dream, which, on waking, one recalls with difficulty and wonder, in the midst of bright familiar surroundings. The two years of convent life, too, seemed to be slipping out of little Madelon's existence, as if they

had never been; she could almost fancy she had been sleeping all these months, and had awakened to find all the same—ah! no, not quite the same. Madelon had a sharp little pang of grief as she thought of her father, and then a glad throb of joy as she thought of Monsieur Horace—and then she suddenly discovered that she was horribly hungry, and, jumping up, she began to walk towards the village.

Not fifty yards from where she had been sleeping, stood the hotel where she had so often stayed, and where she had first met Horace Graham. There, too, everything was stirring and awakening into activity—shutters being thrown back, windows opened, the sunny courtyard swept out. Madelon stood still for a moment looking on. She wondered whether her old friend, Mademoiselle Cécile, was still there; she thought it would be very pleasant to go in and see her, and

have some breakfast in the big *salle-à-manger*, with the pink and yellow paper roses, and long rows of windows looking out into the courtyard and garden. But then, she further reflected, breakfasting at an hotel might probably cost a great deal of money, and she had so little money to spare; so that on the whole it might be better to see what she could find in a shop, and she walked quickly up the village street. Chaudfontaine contains none of the luxuries, and as few as possible of the necessaries of life, which are for the most part supplied from Liége; but sour bread is not unknown there, and Madelon having procured a great, dark tough hunch for her sous, turned back towards the hotel. She stood outside the iron railing, eating her bread, and watching what was going on inside; the stir and small bustle had a positive fascination for her, after her months of seclusion in the con-

vent. It brought back her old life with the strangest vividness, joining on the present with the past which had been so happy; it was as if she had been suddenly brought back into air and light after long years of darkness and silence. Through the open door of the hotel she could see the shadowy green of the garden beyond. Was the swing in which she had so often sat for hours still there? The windows of the salon were open too, and there were the old pictures on the wall, the piano just where it used to stand, and a short, stout figure, in skirt and camisole, moving about, who might be Mademoiselle Cécile herself. Presently some children came running out into the courtyard, with shining hair and faces, and clean white pinafores, fresh out of the nurse's hands. Madelon looked at them with a sudden sense of having grown much older than she used to be—almost grown

up, compared to these small things. She had been no bigger than that when she had first seen Monsieur Horace. She tried to recall their first meeting, but in truth she could not remember much about it; it was so long ago, and succeeding visits had so nearly effaced the remembrance of that early time, that it was rather the shadowy memory of a memory, than the reality itself, that came back to her mind.

Madelon had long finished her breakfast, but, busy with these recollections, was still lingering outside the courtyard, when a gentleman and lady came out of the hotel and walked down towards the gate. The gentleman was stout, black-haired, red-faced, and good-humoured-looking; the lady elderly, thin, and freckled, with a much tumbled silk gown, and frizzy, sandy hair, under a black net bonnet, adorned with many artificial flowers. In all our Madelon's reminis-

cences of the past, these two figures assuredly had no place, and yet this was by no means the first time they had met at this very hotel. The lady was the Countess G——, with whom one memorable evening Madelon had had a grand fight over a roulette board; the gentleman was Horace Graham's *quondam* fellow-traveller, the Countess's old admirer, and now her husband.

They were talking as they came together down the courtyard, and Madelon caught the last words of their conversation.

"Adieu, *mon ami*," cried the lady, as they approached the gate; "I shall rejoin you this afternoon at Liége."

"And by the earliest train possible, I beg of you," answered the other. "I may find it necessary to go on to Brussels this evening."

"By the earliest train possible, *mon ami*. Adieu, then,—*au revoir*."

"*Au revoir, ma chérie,*" answered the gentleman, turning back to the hotel, but pausing before he had taken a dozen steps.

"*Ma chérie,* you will not forget my business at Madame Bertrand's?"

"But no, *mon ami,* it shall be attended to without fail."

"*Ma chérie*——"

"*Mon ami*——"

"You must hasten, or you will miss the train."

"I go, I go," cried the Countess, waving her parasol in token of farewell, and hurrying out of the gateway. These last words aroused Madelon also. In hearing strange voices talking what seemed some familiar, half-forgotten tongue, she had almost forgotten the train; but she started up now from where she had been half standing, half leaning, and followed the Countess across the bridge into the railway station. Indeed

she had only just time to take her ticket, before the train for Spa came rushing up with slackening speed into the station. There were few passengers either coming or going at this early hour, but Madelon's heart gave a great jump as she saw two black-robed figures get out of one of the carriages and come towards her. In another moment she saw they were Sœurs de Charité, with a dress quite different from that worn by the nuns; but the imaginary alarm suggested very real causes of fear, which somehow had almost slipped from her mind since the first hours of her escape from the convent. In her new, glad sense of freedom, she had quite forgotten that the hour had long since arrived when her flight must most certainly be discovered, and that there were, after all, still only six miles of road between her and her old life; and it was with quite a newly awakened dread that even now unfriendly

eyes might be watching her from some one of the carriage windows, that she jumped hastily into the nearest compartment she could find. It was not empty, however, for the Countess, who had preceded her across the bridge, had already taken her place, and was arranging her flounces in one corner. She looked up, astounded at Madelon's somewhat precipitate entrance; and as the train moved off, she treated her small companion to a most unceremonious stare, which took in every detail of her personal appearance.

"Are you travelling alone?" she asked at length abruptly.

"Yes, Madame," said Madelon, getting rather red. She had resented the stare, and did not want to be talked to; her one idea now was to get to Spa unnoticed. But she had ill-chosen her travelling companion—the Countess was a lady whose impertinent curiosity was rarely baffled.

"What! quite alone? Is there nobody at all with you?"

"No, Madame."

"But that is very extraordinary, and not at all the thing for a young person of your age. What makes you go about all by yourself?"

"I—I have no one to go with me," faltered Madelon, getting more and more hot and uncomfortable.

"But that is very strange, and, as one may say, very improper; have you no friends?"

"Yes,—no," began Madelon; but at that moment, with a shriek, the train entered a tunnel, and the sudden noise and darkness put a stop to the conversation for a time. The Countess began again presently, however, as they went speeding across the next valley.

"Do you live at Chaudfontaine?" was her next inquiry.

"No," says poor Madelon, looking round despairingly as for some means of escape; but that was hopeless, and she could only shrink further into her corner.

"And where are you going now, then?"

"I am going to Spa."

"To Spa? Ah, indeed—and what are you going to do there? Perhaps," said the Countess more graciously, and with another glance at the shabby frock and poor little bundle, "perhaps you are going into some situation there?"

"Situation?" repeated Madelon bewildered.

"Yes—you would make a very nice little nursery-maid, I daresay," said the Countess, with much condescension; "and, indeed, if you should be wanting any assistance in that way, you have only to apply to me; and if you can produce good credentials, I shall be most happy to assist you. I am always

ready to help deserving young people."

Madelon grew red as fire. "I am not a nursery-maid," she said with much indignation; "I don't know what you mean, and you have no right to ask me so many questions—I will not answer any more."

Another shriek and another tunnel; when they once more emerged into daylight, Madelon had retreated into that corner of the carriage remotest from the Countess, who, for her part, showed some wisdom, perhaps, in making no attempt to resume the conversation.

At Pepinster they changed trains; and here Madelon found an empty carriage, where, without disturbance, she might sit and congratulate herself on having accomplished this first step in her journey. Indeed, this seemed to her so great a success, that she felt nothing but hope as she sat curled up in a corner, only wishing vaguely, from

time to time, that her head would not ache so much, and that she did not feel so very, very tired. She had a great confidence in the swiftness of the train, which was every moment increasing the distance between herself and Liége, and so, as she thought, lessening the chances of her being discovered in case of pursuit; and yet, when it stopped at length at the well-remembered Spa station, she lingered a moment in the carriage, feeling as if it were a friendly place of refuge she was leaving, to face unknown dangers in the outer world.

No one noticed her, however, as she slowly alighted and looked about her. There were, as we have said, but few passengers at this early hour, and the platform was already nearly deserted. At a little distance she could see Madame la Comtesse and her flounces walking briskly away; on one side was an English family of the re-

ceived type, wrangling with porters and omnibus drivers in the midst of their luggage; on the other, an invalid Russian wrapped to the nose in furs, leaning on his valet's arm; in the foreground, a party of gay Liégeois, come over for a day's amusement. No one looked at our poor little Madelon, as, half-bewildered, she stood for a moment on the platform, her bundle on her arm, her veil pulled down over her face; one after the other they vanished, and then she too followed, out into the tree-bordered road, with the familiar hills on either side, sheltering the little gay white town. The day had changed within the last hour, the sunshine was gone, and in its place was a grey, lowering sky. Madelon shivered as she walked along; her head ached more and more; she wondered what it was that made her feel so tired and weak, and then she remembered that she had been ill for a long

time, and that she had been up all night. "I will ask Madame Bertrand to let me lie down and go to sleep," she thought, "before I go to the Redoute, and then I shall be all right." She walked on as fast as she could, so as to arrive sooner at the hotel; she remembered its situation perfectly, in the Place Royale, not far from the stand where the band used to play every evening; and there it was at last, all unchanged since she had last seen it three years ago, and with "Hôtel de Madrid" shining in big gold letters above the door.

Every one who knows Spa, knows the Place Royale, with its broad walks and rows of trees, leading from the shady avenues of the Promenade à Sept Heures at the one end, to the winding street with its gay shops at the other. The Hôtel de Madrid was situated about half-way down the Place, and, as compared with the great

hotels of Spa, it was small, mean, and third rate, little frequented therefore by the better class of visitors, and with no particular recommendation beyond its situation on the Place Royale, its cheap terms, and its excellent landlady. M. Linders, whose means did not always admit of reckless expenditure, and whose credit was not wholly unlimited, had gone there two or three times, when visiting Spa to retrieve fallen fortunes; and the first time he had taken Madelon with him, she and Madame Bertrand had become such fast friends, that, for his child's sake, he never afterwards went anywhere else. Madelon had the most lively, pleasant recollections of the stout motherly landlady, whose store of bonbons and confitures had been absolutely endless. Of all her friends in this class, Madame Bertrand had been the one to whom she had most attached herself, and now it was almost with the

feeling of finding herself at home that she saw the hotel before her.

The door stood open, and she went into the small hall, or rather passage, which ran through the house, ending in another door, which, also open, afforded a green view of many currant and gooseberry bushes in Madame Bertrand's garden. To the right was the staircase, to the left the *salle-à-manger*, a low room with two windows looking on to the Place, and furnished with half a dozen small round tables, for the hotel was of too unpretentious a nature to aspire to a *table-d'hôte;* the floor lacked polish, and the furniture was shabby, yet the room had a friendly look to our homeless Madelon, as a frequent resting-place in such wanderings to and fro as had been hers in former years. She went in. A man was sitting at one of the tables, a tall bottle of red wine at his side, and a dish of cutlets

before him, eating his late *déjeûner*, and reading a newspaper; whilst a waiter moved about, arranging knives and forks, table-napkins, and *pistolets*, with occasional pauses for such glimpses of the outer world as could be obtained through the muslin curtains hanging before the somewhat dingy windows.

"Is Madame Bertrand at home?" asked Madelon, coming up to him.

The man stared down at the shabbily-dressed little figure before him, glanced at the bundle hanging on her arm, and then answered civilly enough that Madame Bertrand was not at home. Did Mademoiselle want anything?

"I wanted to speak to Madame Bertrand," answered Madelon, rather piteously; "will she be back soon, do you think? When can I see her?"

"*Eh, je n'en sais rien*," said the man. "If

Mademoiselle wants to see her, she had better call again—or she can leave a message," and he went on laying the tables.

Madelon sat down despondingly on a chair near the door, hardly knowing what to do next. It was the first check in the carrying out of her little programme, a programme so neatly arranged, but with this defect, mainly arising from inexperience, that it had made no sort of allowance for unforeseen circumstances—and yet of such so many were likely to arise. She had quite settled in her own mind what she was going to say to Madame Bertrand, and also what Madame Bertrand would say to her, but she had not provided for this other contingency of not finding her at all. She sat and considered for a minute. Two or three men came in laughing and talking, and stared in her face as they passed by and called for what they wanted. She began to

feel uncomfortable; she could not stay there till Madame Bertrand returned; what if she were to go to the Redoute first, and then return to the hotel? Yes, that would be the best plan; if only she had not felt so very tired, with such aching limbs and head; the sight and smell of the meat and wine made her feel almost faint. However, that could not be helped, she must do the best she could. She went up to the waiter again. "I must go now," she said, "but I will come back presently to see Madame Bertrand; may I leave these things here?" and she held up her bundle.

"Mademoiselle wants a room—or is it something for Madame?" said the man perplexed at this strange little visitor, who was wholly out of the range of his experience.

"No, no, it is mine," said Madelon; "if I might leave it here—"

The waiter set down the tray he was holding, and left the room followed by Madeleine.

"Mademoiselle Henriette!" he cried.

"Mademoiselle Henriette is in the garden," answered a shrill voice from above; and at the same moment a trim little figure appeared from amongst the currant and gooseberry bushes, and came in at the open door leading into the passage.

"Does any one want me?" she cried.

"Pardon, Madame," said Madelon coming forward to tell her little story, whilst the waiter returned to his plates and dishes, "I wanted to see Madame Bertrand, but they say she is out, and that I must return later; might I leave my things here for a little while till I come back?"

"Do you want a room, Mademoiselle?" said the other; "I regret to say that the hotel is quite full; we have not a single bed at your disposal."

"Ah, what shall I do? what do you think would be best?" said poor Madelon piteously, suddenly breaking down in the grown-up part she had been half unconsciously acting, and ready to burst into tears. Things were not turning out at all as she had wished or intended. "I did want a room, but I thought I should have found Madame Bertrand, and she would have helped me; I don't know what to do now."

"Do you know my aunt? I am Madame Bertrand's niece," says Mademoiselle Henriette in explanation. "She will not be in just yet, but if you like to wait in here a little while, you can do so, or you can return by-and-by."

She opened the door of a small parlour as she spoke, and stood aside for Madeleine to enter. A little faded room, with a high desk standing in the window, gaudy ornaments on the mantelpiece, a worn Utrecht

velvet sofa, and a semicircle of worsted-work chairs—not much in it all to awaken enthusiasm, one would think, and yet, as Madelon came in, she forgot disappointment, and fatigue, and everything else for a moment, in a glad recognition of well-remembered objects.

"It is not a bit altered," she cried quite joyfully, turning to Mademoiselle Henriette as she spoke.

"You have been here before, then," says Mademoiselle, looking curiously at the child, and seeing for the first time, in the clearer light of the room, what a child she was.

"Yes," answered Madelon, "I used to come here very often; we liked coming, because Madame Bertrand was so kind. I know she will be glad to see me again—ah!" she cried, breaking off in the middle of her sentence, "there is the little china dog I used to play with, and the bonbonnière with

the flowers painted on the top—ah, and my little glass—do you know, Madame used always let me drink out of that glass when I had supper with her—but you were not here then, Mademoiselle."

"That is true, I have only been with my aunt about six months; she is growing old, and wants some one to help her," answered Mademoiselle Henriette, a most brisk, capable looking little personage, "but I daresay she will recollect you. Are you all alone? have you come far to-day?"

"Not very far," said Madelon colouring up, and suddenly recalled to the present. "I think, please, I will leave my things here now, and come back presently."

"I think you had better stay here quietly and rest; you look very tired," said Mademoiselle kindly; and indeed as the glow faded from her cheeks, Madelon showed a most colourless little face, with heavy eye-

lids, that seemed as if they could hardly open.

"No, I would rather go out now," she answered, "I can rest afterwards."

Indeed, tired as she felt, she had changed her mind, thinking that if she stayed now, it would be hard to set off again by-and-by, and she was determined to get her business done to-day—she had a morbid dread, too, of questions from strangers, after her experience with the Countess.

"I *must* go out," she repeated; "but I will come back again, and then perhaps Madame Bertrand will have come in, and will tell me where I can sleep to-night."

Mademoiselle Henriette had neither time nor sufficient interest in the child to contest the point further; and Madelon, having safely deposited her bundle in a corner of the sofa, departed on her errand.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT MADELON DID AT THE REDOUTE.

AND so more than half Madelon's troubles are over, and she is really approaching the moment so looked and longed for, for which so much has been dared and risked! Ah, is it so that our dearest hopes get fulfilled? In after years, Madelon always looked back upon the remainder of that day, as upon the previous night, as a sort of horrible nightmare, through which she struggled more and more painfully—to what awakening we shall presently see. The golden morning had faded into a grey drizzle; the mist hung upon the hills, hiding

their tops, and there were low heavy clouds, presaging an afternoon of more decided rain. The golden hope, too, that had so sustained and cheered our Madelon, seemed to have suddenly faded also; and in its place was that ever increasing sense of utter weariness and aching limbs, which seemed as if it would overpower her before she had gone a dozen yards from the house. She went on bravely, however, trying to brace herself with the consciousness of a great purpose, very near its fulfilment now; but somehow she seemed almost to have forgotten what it was, or why she had ever formed it. Her keenest feeling at that moment was, perhaps, that expressed by the quick, furtive glance with which she looked round from time to time, as some following footstep made itself heard behind her. The sudden alarm at Chaudfontaine had given rise to a haunting dread, which she was un-

able to shake off, though even that was rather a vague sensation that a well-defined, reasonable fear.

Still she kept on her way, strong in the strength of a resolution that had so taken possession of all the deepest feelings and affections of a most ardent little nature, that nothing but absolute physical inability could have held her back from keeping to it now. It was perhaps well for her, however, that with her childish pleasure in planning every detail, she had arranged everything beforehand with such minuteness, that she had no need to reflect now as to what she had to do. She had only to go on mechanically, and indeed she seemed to have no power of reflection left in her at all, as she walked slowly up the street, past the gay shops, where, a happy, chattering little girl, she had so often lingered with her father, to choose some pretty trifle.

Almost without thinking, so familiar was the road, did she enter the Redoute, and ascend the wide staircase; and then at last she feels a thrill as she sees before her the big salons that she has so often re-visited in her dreams, with their gilding, and mirrors, and velvet, that she loves so well, and with which some of her happiest hours are associated—sees, too, the long green tables, where Monsieur Horace's fortune is to be made, and Madelon's promise redeemed at last.

Nothing seemed so strange to our inexperienced Madelon, as that everything should be unchanged; only yesterday she had been sitting quietly in the convent garden, with long years separating her from the old life—and now it seemed but yesterday that she had been here. She went straight up to the *rouge-et-noir* table. She was familiar with both it and roulette, but

of the two games *rouge-et-noir* was that which M. Linders had always most affected; and without thinking much about it, Madelon had fixed upon it as the one at which she would try her fortune. It was still early, and the tables had not long been opened, yet there was already a crowd two or three deep round them; and Madelon, hovering on the outside, had to wait some time for an opening that would enable her to approach near enough to lay down her money. It seemed so natural to be standing there watching the play—the expectant silence, the clink of the coin, the monotonous drone of the croupier, were all so familiar, that for a minute she quite forgot that she had any special object in view; and then, with one of those starts of realization with which from time to time she seemed to waken up out of some confused dream, she remembered

why she was there, and what she had to do.

It was only then, that on taking out her purse with its cherished contents, so as to be ready when her turn should come, it flashed across her mind that she had intended to ask Madame Bertrand to change the two ten-franc pieces that formed her capital, into pieces of five francs, which would have given her two chances more. Well—it could not be helped now, and, after all, had she not more than enough? "*Dix francs, et je ferai fortune—dix francs, et je ferai fortune—*" The old words seem to set themselves to a tune in Madelon's head, chiming in with the croupier's perpetual, "*Rouge gagne et la couleur*," "*Rouge perd et la couleur*," whilst the two precious coins grew warm in the little hand that was clasped so tightly over them. She had half relapsed into her dreamy state, when a woman who had been standing in front of her came

pushing through the crowd. Madelon instinctively stepped forward to take her place, and roused up on finding that she was near enough to the table to lay down her money. The croupier was counting out the cards for the next stakes. Madelon waited till that turn was over, and then, leaning across the back of the chair before her, threw one of her little gold pieces on the table.

It was on the red she had staked. There was a pause as the other players made their game; Madelon's languid pulses began to flutter with a sudden interest, increasing to breathless excitement as the croupier began to deal out the cards. "*Rouge perd et la couleur*," and the poor little piece was swept away. Madelon's heart sank with a sudden pang, and then it beat faster, and her cheeks flushed, as, with a quick impulse, without a moment's hesitation, she threw her remain-

ing ten francs on to the same spot. Another pause—another deal. "*Rouge perd et la couleur!*" She had lost again, and her last chance was gone.

Surely at the gambling-tables of Spa that day there was no more pitiful little tragedy played out than that represented by these two warm little gold coins, raked away by an indifferent croupier into a great careless heap, and carrying with them how many hopes, and ambitions, and longings—all crushed and scattered in one brief moment. Madelon half uttered a stifled cry, half made an involuntary movement forward; then, recollecting herself, shrank back, disengaging herself from the crowd. The gap was immediately filled up; no one remarked, or cared for the poor, despairing child. The brave little spirit almost gave way as Madelon, with a sudden sick feeling of faintness and giddiness, was obliged to sit down

on the nearest sofa—but not quite even then. All was lost—nothing now remained for her to do in those *salons*, and she must not stay there, she knew; so in a minute she got up again, and made her way out of the room and down the staircase, clinging to the balustrade, blindly groping her way, as it were, till she was once more in the street.

Here the fresh air revived her a little, and she was able to consider what she should do next. Ah! what, indeed, was she to do, with a programme so rudely disarranged, with all her little plans and projects so shattered to fragments, that to restore them to anything like their former shape seemed hopeless? Madelon could think of nothing better to do than to go back to the hotel from which she had come. She had left all her small possessions there, and perhaps Madame Bertrand would

have come in, and would be able to help her. In all the world our despairing Madelon could turn her thoughts nowhere at this crisis but to the good, unconscious Madame Bertrand, the one friend to whom she could apply, and who might perhaps be willing to assist her.

It seemed a long time before she found herself at the hotel again, and yet, in fact, it was scarcely more than half an hour since she had left it. Through the open door to the left she might have seen the waiter still busy over his plates and glasses, while the gentleman who had been breakfasting had only just finished his newspaper. But Madelon never thought of them, nor looked in that direction, indeed; with dazed eyes she was making her way along the semi-darkness of the passage to the parlour at the end, when she ran right up against some one who was coming towards her—a stout

old lady, with grey hair, and a little grey moustache, a very gay shawl, and a large bonnet, with primrose-coloured ribbons. Madelon recognised her in an instant. "Oh! Madame Bertrand!" she cried, flinging her arms round her, "don't you know me? I am Madeleine Linders."

Madame Bertrand stepped back, a little overwhelmed by this vehement salutation, and then,

"Madeleine Linders?" she cried. "What! little Mademoiselle Madelon, who used to come here so often with her papa?"

"Yes, I am little Madelon," she answered; and indeed the sight of the kind old face, the sound of the cheery, familiar voice, made her feel quite a small Madelon again. "You have not forgotten me, have you, Madame Bertrand?"

"Indeed I have not, though you have grown into such a tall young lady. But

why have you not been here for such a long time? Where is your papa?"

"Ah! Madame," says Madelon, her sense of utter discouragement gaining ground again, as the first flush of pleasure at the the sight of her old friend died away, "I am very unhappy. Papa died nearly three years ago, and I have been in a convent ever since, with Aunt Thérèse; but Aunt Thérèse is dead too, and they said that I was to be a nun, so I ran away."

"To be a nun!—a child like you? How could they think of such a thing?" cried the good old woman. "And you look tired out. Come in here and tell me all about it."

She drew her into the little parlour as she spoke. Mademoiselle Henriette was sitting at the high desk in the window looking on the garden, and some one else was there too, fanning herself in one of the worsted-

work chairs. It was Madame la Comtesse, who had come there to settle her husband's business with Madame Bertrand. Both looked up as the landlady came into the room, half carrying, half dragging Madelon.

"*Pauvre petite! pauvre petite!*" she kept on saying, shaking and nodding her kind old head the while.

She made the child lie down on the sofa, pulled a cushion under her head, and then introduced her generally with "They wanted to make her a nun, and so she has run away from the convent."

"Run away!" cried Mademoiselle Henriette, turning quite round. "Well, I thought there was something very queer——"

"Run away!" cried the Countess. "Dear me, but that is very naughty!"

These little speeches, coming in the midst of Madame Bertrand's effusive benevolence, seemed quite irrelevant to the matter in

hand, but nevertheless imparted a sudden chill.

"Not at all naughty," said Madame, at last, rallying, and still busy about the sofa, where Madelon had passively and wearily laid back her aching little head. "It was the very best thing she could do. Nun, indeed! I have no great opinion of convents, nor nuns either, myself; an idle pack—the best of them only say more prayers than their neighbours, and there is nothing very clever in that. I could do it myself, if I had the time."

"But it is very singular," said the Countess, getting up. "That is certainly the same little girl I travelled with from Chaudfontaine this morning. I thought there was something odd about her; she would not answer any of my questions. But there is no convent at Chaudfontaine. Are you sure she is telling you the truth?"

"Of course she is, Madame—I have known her since—since she was that high," replied Madame Bertrand, with some indignation; a reply so conclusive to herself, that its want of apparent logic may be pardoned. "Tell me, *mon enfant*, where is your convent that you speak of?"

"At Liége," said Madelon, rousing and trying to sit up. "Aunt Thérèse was the Superior, but she is dead. I walked to Chaudfontaine in the night—and—oh, Madame Bertrand, don't let them come and take me back!" She gave a terrified glance round the room, and caught hold of Madame Bertrand's gown.

"No one shall take you away; don't be afraid, *chère petite;* but tell us all about it. Walked to Chaudfontaine in the night! Why, you must be half dead, poor little one! And what have you come to Spa for —have you any friends here?"

"No," said Madelon, "I thought you would help me, and let me stay here for a little while."

"And so you shall—for as long as you like," said Madame; "but what have you come here for? Have you no friends to go to?"

"Yes—I—I—ah, I forgot!" cried Madelon, burying her face in her hands. All of a sudden she remembered how she had intended writing to Monsieur Horace, all that she had meant to say to him, and how she would have asked him to come and help her—and now all was at an end. As to telling Madame Bertrand or any one else of her cherished plans—never; that was her own secret, which she would never, never part with, except to Monsieur Horace himself. "I forgot," she cried, "I have no one —ah! what shall I do, what shall I do?"

"Do!" said the Countess, interposing

with much prompt energy, "it is not difficult to know what you must do; you must go back to the convent, of course. I never heard of anything so improper as your running away."

"No, no, no!" cried Madelon, "I cannot go back there—never; they would kill me." She flung herself down on the sofa again, while old Madame Bertrand tried to comfort her. No one should make her go back; she was her *chère petite*, she would take care of her—and was she not very hungry? would she like some soup, or some cakes, or some bread and *confiture?*

Meanwhile the Countess was saying to Mademoiselle Henriette, "This is a most extraordinary affair. If we do not take care your excellent aunt will be imposed upon; but I am going back to Liége in an hour, and can perfectly well take the little girl with me, and leave her at the convent."

"Indeed, Madame, we should be much indebted to you," said Mademoiselle Henriette briskly; "it is evident that she has no friends, and has come to my aunt simply because she was in some way acquainted with her formerly. As you say, if we do not take care we shall certainly have her on our hands; my aunt is quite capable of it."

"Then that is easily settled," said the Countess; "I will take charge of her. No thanks, Mademoiselle, I am only doing my duty. I really do not know what young people of the present day will come to. Does any one know what her name is, or anything about her?"

Madame Bertrand, who had been vainly endeavouring to extract from our despondent little Madelon any decided expression of opinion on the subject of cakes or confitures, overheard this last question. "Poor little one, I know her very well," she said, lower-

ing her voice confidentially, "her name is Linders; her father was Monsieur Linders, a famous gambler—it was long before you came here, Henriette, and Madame will not have heard of him probably; but here in Spa he was well known, and he used often to come to our hotel."

"Linders!" cried the Countess—"M. Linders—yes, certainly I remember him perfectly, and the little girl too. M. Linders? —of course, every one knew him."

"Ah! Madame, did you know my father?" said Madelon, raising her head at these last words, and clasping her hands imploringly; "be good to me then, I entreat of you; do not speak of sending me back to the convent. I cannot go!"

There was something pitiful in the child's voice and gesture, something pathetic in the little appeal to her father's memory, that might have touched any one less animated

by a stern sense of duty than the Countess. As it was, she was not in the least affected.

"On the contrary, *mon enfant*," she answered, "I shall be doing you the greatest kindness, and no more than my duty, in taking you back there; and we have agreed that you shall return with me at once."

"I will not go!" cried Madelon wildly; "I cannot, I will not!—I will not! Do you hear? What right have you to make me? I am not your child!—I will not go with you!"

She got up as she spoke, confronting the Countess, and trying to throw all the energy of which she was capable into her vehement words. But even in her own ears her voice sounded shrill and weak, and seemed to die away as if she were talking in her sleep; the very strength of her emotion appeared unreal, and failing her when she most

needed it: her words seemed to have no meaning, and as she finished speaking, she dropped down on her seat again with a little sob, feeling that she was conquered, for she had no power of resistance left in her.

So she lay upon the sofa in a sort of doze, while a tribunal of three sat upon, condemned, and sentenced this poor little criminal, who knew nothing of what they were saying after she had made her own ineffectual little protest. Madame Bertrand, indeed, good old soul, with the softest and kindest of hearts, would not at first hear of her being sent away; she was fond of the child, she said; she had known her for years, and felt sure there was something in her story that they did not yet understand. But Madame Bertrand was old—moreover, she was not a little in awe of the niece whom she had called in to assist her failing powers; moreover, she had perhaps a lurking idea

that they might after all be right, and that there was something exceptionally heinous in running away from a convent; so she was soon overruled by the other two, who settled the matter in a very summary way —Madelon must return to the convent with Madame la Comtesse that very day.

She was roused up presently, and made to drink some wine by Madame Bertrand, who was in despair because she could eat none of the good things she had provided, and felt nothing but an old traitress, as Madelon stood up at last, looking about her with dazed eyes; and then, without further opposition, submissively put on her hat, took up her bundle, and prepared to follow the Countess. Indeed, had Madame Bertrand known how recently the child had recovered from a long illness, nothing, I think, would have induced her to let her go; but she only supposed she was over-tired

with her strange night-journey; and, in fact, the wine and the rest together had so far revived Madelon, that she appeared quite capable of walking down to the station with the Countess. Madame Bertrand gave her a great hug as she wished her good-bye, and was perhaps a little aggrieved at the passive way in which Madelon received it.

"If ever you want help, come back to me—will you not, *mon enfant*?—and I will help you, if I can."

"Yes," said Madelon. "But they will not let me run away again, will they?"

"Let you run away, *ma petite?*"

"Yes, Aunt Thérèse, you know—she won't let me do it again."

"Your aunt? You told me she was dead!" cried Madame.

"Yes, so she is," said Madelon. "I was forgetting, I think. Good-bye, Madame Bertrand. You will let me stay next time, will

you not? But I must go now." And she followed the Countess out of the house without another word.

Madame la Comtesse, having got her own way, was kind enough to the child who had so unwittingly strayed across her path. When they reached the station she gave her her ticket, made her sit down in the waiting-room, and even offered her refreshment in the interval before the train started. Indeed, we should err if we attributed to the Countess, whom this little episode in our Madelon's history has brought for the second, and, we may trust, for the last time, before us—we should err, I say, in attributing to her any feeling of ill-will towards Madelon, or any special interest in her conduct or fate. Neither need it be imagined that she was actuated by any large views of duty towards the world in general; she was not at all benevolent, but neither was she particularly ill-

natured; she was merely a shallow-minded, frivolous woman, who, having long since lowered her standard of perfection to suit her own attainments, saw fit to measure every one else by her own narrow ideal, and to set them right where they proved themselves wanting—a convenient process, which enabled her to satisfy her vague sense of duty, and right and wrong, without any reference to her own possible shortcomings. In capturing our little stray Madelon, and taking her back to the convent, she felt she was doing a deed that would afford her matter for self-congratulation for days to come; and she was gracious and affable accordingly, speaking to Madelon in a tone of condescending good-nature which was quite lost upon the child, who was beyond caring for kindness or unkindness just then. She was only conscious of some terrible burden,

which she could not define nor reason upon, but which seemed to oppress and weigh her down, making her incapable of thought, or speech, or motion. When they got into the railway carriage she could only lean back in the corner, with a general sense that something dreadful had happened, or was going to happen, but that her head ached too much, and felt too confused, for her to remember what it was all about.

They changed carriages at Pepinster, and, still in the same dream of misery, Madelon followed the Countess from one train to another. They set off again, but, presently, as the slackening speed showed that they were approaching another station, she suddenly woke up to the keenest perception of her situation, with a quickening of her numbed senses to the most vivid realization of all she had lost, of all she might have to endure. Ah, it was all true,

and no dream—she had run away from the convent to make Monsieur Horace's fortune; and she had not done it, and now all was over, and she was being taken back to the convent—and there would be no more chance of escape for her—never more. In the agony of this thought she turned towards the Countess, with a half-formed intention of throwing herself at her feet, and imploring, in such voice and accents as should admit of no refusal, to be allowed to go away—anyhow, anywhere, only as far as possible from Liége. But she checked herself as she saw that the Countess, with a handkerchief thrown over her face, had comfortably composed herself to sleep in one corner, and a new idea suggested itself as the train stopped at a little village station. The child glanced towards the woman; she still slept, or appeared to do so, and the next moment Madelon had opened the door, and

taking up her bundle, had slid swiftly and silently out of the carriage.

The train moved on, and a drowsy Countess might presently awake to find with astonishment that she was alone in the compartment; but our little Madelon, left standing on the platform, had slipped out of her sight and knowledge for ever.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RESTAURANT AT LE TROOZ.

THE train disappeared, and our forlorn little Madelon remained standing alone on the platform. Forlorn indeed! It was raining hard now, a thick, persistent drizzle, through which everything looked dim and blurred, and which was almost as dense as the low-hanging mists that hid the tops of the hills. Madelon stood still and shivered for a minute, clutching her little bundle under her cloak, and trying to collect her ideas.

Not a hundred yards off was the village, lying between the hills in the next valley to

Chaudfontaine, and not more than three miles from that place, but shut out from it by a barrier of rocky, wooded hill, round which there was only just space for the road and stream to wind; an amphibious little village, half-in and half-out of the water apparently, for it stood just where the stream spread out in wide shallows, round low islands, on and amongst which the houses were clustered and scattered. Madelon instinctively turned towards it; she had the very vaguest idea in her poor, bewildered little brain as to where she was, or what she was going to do, only one thing obvious in the surrounding uncertainties—that she could not remain standing on the platform in the pouring rain. She gave up her ticket mechanically, passed through the gate, and followed the muddy road leading to the cottages. She was very tired, she had never felt quite so tired before, and her knees

trembled as they had done that day when the fever came on at the convent; she was so dizzy too, that she had to stop now and then, to grasp the one fact of her being where she was and not somewhere else altogether; her single idea was to go on walking until—until when? That was a question she could not have answered, only somewhere she must go, where she would be out of the way of countess or nuns, or any other enemy who might be laying in wait to pounce upon her. This was all she thought about as she passed along the village street, which was dull and deserted-looking enough on this wet, grey afternoon, till the sight of a church with an open door, suggested something quite different, and which was a positive relief after that nightmare notion of walking perpetually with failing limbs, and a sense of pursuit behind. She would go in there, and sit down and

rest for a little while. By-and-by, when the giddiness and trembling had gone off, she would be better able to think of what she should do; she would be out of the rain, too, there—the cold rain, which had already drenched her cloak and skirt.

She went in; it was a village church of the simplest description, very small, with plain wooden benches and confessionals, and a high altar with inexpensive decorations, in nowise remarkable. But hardly was Madelon inside the door, when she stood suddenly motionless, transfixed by a horrible terror that, weak and exhausted as she was, wholly seized and gained possession of her; for, raised in the middle of the aisle, covered with a black velvet pall, and with a row of tall candles on either side, stood a coffin, with white embroidery of death's heads on the pall, and little banners with painted death's heads decorating every

candle. To the terrified, speechless child, the skulls seemed to become animated—to grin; they seemed to move; the whole air was suddenly full of them, chattering, dancing, swarming round her; she tried to scream, but could not; she turned to fly from the dreadful, haunted spot, but with the first step she made, strength and consciousness gave way altogether, and she sank senseless to the ground.

Ten minutes later, a woman of the village, coming in to see the preparations for the funeral of Monsieur N——, lately one of the great proprietors of the neighbourhood, nearly stumbled over Madelon's prostrate form. She started back, half uttering an exclamation of surprise and alarm; then, seeing that it was a child who was lying so still upon the stone floor, she knelt down by her, laid her head in her lap, and began rubbing her hands. Madelon was not quite

unconscious, apparently, for she moved her head uneasily, and uttered a low moan. "She is not dead, at any rate," muttered the woman, still chafing the cold little hands, whilst she studied the small white face, the short rings of hair just appearing under the hat all crushed in her fall, the bundle lying at her side, and the worn frock and cloak soaked with rain. "I wonder if she is alone?" added the woman to herself. She glanced round the empty church, then gently laying Madelon on the floor again, with a cushion to support her head, she went to the door, and peered out into the rain for a few moments; then, returning, without calling for help, or summoning anyone, she stooped down, took Madelon in her arms—which, indeed, she was well able to do, for she was a tall, strong woman, between thirty and forty, and the child was very slight and thin after her recent illness

—and carried her out of the church, down the street, towards the end of the village. No one was stirring in the pouring rain, or seemed to notice her, except one or two boys, who ran after her shouting and singing—"Eh, Jeanne-Marie, Jeanne-Marie—what have you got to-day, Jeanne-Marie?" And to them she gave no sort of heed, walking steadily and swiftly on, without even turning her head, till she paused before a low, white-washed cottage, standing a little apart from the village, between the poplars that bordered the road. In front was a bench, and on one side a vine, all dripping and forlorn, was trained over a trellis that sloped from the roof, and, with wooden supports, made a shelter for a row of bee-hives placed on a plank beneath; under the front gable was a wicker contrivance for pigeons, and below it, in large gold letters on a blue board, the words, "Café et Restaur-

ent." The door opened at once into the little public room of the humblest pretentions, furnished with a cupboard containing a store of bottles and glasses, a stove in one corner, above it some bright copper tea-kettles, a dozen chairs, and a deal table pushed near the one small window that looked out on the road and the stream beyond, and then across fields, and meadows, and trees, to the hills. A man with a heavy loutish face and figure was sitting with his arms on the table, twirling a glass about in his fingers, a bottle half full of wine before him. He turned round as Jeanne-Marie entered with Madelon in her arms, and rising slowly went towards them.

"Eh, Jeanne-Marie, what have you got there?" he said.

"Does that concern you?" answered the woman sharply enough; "drink your wine, Jacques Monnier, and do not trou-

ble yourself with other people's affairs."

"*Est-elle morte, la petite?*" asked Jacques, recoiling at the sight of Madelon's white face.

"*Est-elle morte?*" repeated Jeanne-Marie, "and with her eyes as wide open as yours! *Allons mon, enfant, du courage,*" she added, as Madelon opened her eyes for a moment; but she closed them again, and the woman looking round said, "There will be no peace here, with you men coming in and out. Open that door for me, Jacques," pointing to one nearly opposite the entrance.

The man obeyed. It opened at the bottom of the ladder-like staircase, a gleam of light from above, showing where another door at the top step led into a small bed-room. Jeanne-Marie carried Madelon upstairs like a baby, took off her hat and damp cloak, laid her on the bed, and then ran down stairs again for a glass of cordial.

Madelon, however, was already reviving, and when Jeanne-Marie went up to her again, she raised herself on the bed, resting on one elbow, and fixed her large eyes upon the woman, first with a look of blank unconsciousness, and then with a sudden light of terror in them, as of some wild hunted thing just caught by its pursuers.

"Don't take me back to the convent!" she cried in sharp, piteous accents; "don't take me back; I can't go, I can't—no, no, no!"

"No one shall take you back," said Jeanne-Marie, trying to soothe her. But she paid no heed.

"Indeed I can't go. Ah, Madame, you said you knew papa; have pity upon me! I promised him I would never be a nun. He died, you know, and sent me to the convent at Liége to be with Aunt Thérèse; but he made me promise before he died. I can't

go back—I should die too. Ah, Madame, have pity on me!"

She was kneeling on the bed now, her hands clasped with her pitiful little imploring gesture. Jeanne-Marie came close to her, and smoothed back her hair caressingly with her rough work-a-day fingers.

"*Soyez tranquille, mon enfant,*" she said, "you shall not be taken back to the convent, and no one shall make you a nun."

"You promise?" said Madelon, catching hold of her arm, and looking into her face with eager, suspicious eyes; "you promise not to take me back?"

"Yes, I promise," said the woman; "fear nothing, *ma petite.*"

"And you won't tell Aunt Thérèse that I ran away? For she would be so angry, you know; she wanted to make me a nun like herself; you won't tell her—you won't, you won't?"

"No, no," said Jeanne-Marie. "I will tell nothing, you are quite safe here; now lie down and be quiet, and I will give you something nice to drink."

But Madelon's eyes wandered; the terrified look came again, and she clung tighter and tighter to Jeanne-Marie.

"Please ask Aunt Thérèse to go away!" she cried; "she is standing there in the corner of the room, staring at me; she will not move—there—there she is, don't you see? Oh! tell her to go away—she stares at me so, and oh! there is her coffin at her side, it is all over death's heads; Aunt Thérèse has a death's head—oh! take me away, take me away!"

With a shriek of terror the child threw herself back on the bed, covering her eyes with her hands, burying her face in the pillow.

Jeanne-Marie went to the top of the

stairs and called "Jacques Monnier!"

"*Hein?*" said the man, coming slowly to the door below, and standing with his broad figure framed in it.

"Jacques," said Jeanne-Marie, "go at once for the doctor, and tell him to come here, for some one who is very ill."

"*Hein?*" said Jacques again, "does that concern me? I must attend to my own affairs, and finish my wine, Jeanne-Marie."

"If you do not go this moment," said the woman, with a little stamp of her foot, "you shall never taste my wine again, with or without payment, Jacques, *et je tiens parole, moi!*"

"There is other wine to be had in Le Trooz," answered the man sulkily, but moving nevertheless towards the entrance, when he was recalled by Jeanne-Marie.

"Jacques," she said, coming two or three steps down the stairs, "if Monsieur le Doc-

teur inquires who is ill, you will say it is my niece."

"But she is then your niece, *la petite*," said Jacques, scratching his head as an outward expression of some inward perplexity.

"You will tell Monsieur le Docteur what I say," repeated Jeanne-Marie imperiously, "and make haste;" and she went upstairs again, and closed the bed-room door with a certain emphasis, as though to prevent further discussion.

Madelon was still lying on the bed, with her face buried in the pillow; a violent shivering of cold or of fear had seized her, but she resisted Jeanne-Marie's efforts to raise her, with the obstinacy of a strong will acted on by intense physical alarm. But at length the woman's persuasive words appeared to have a soothing effect, though she seemed scarcely to take in their meaning,

for she allowed herself to be undressed and put into bed, and after taking some warm drink, fell into a restless, starting sleep.

Jeanne-Marie drew a curtain across the small window, so as to shut out the slanting sunbeams, which were pouring into the room, on to the patch-work quilt and white pillow where the little feverish head lay so uneasily; then, taking up her knitting, she sat down by the bedside, and as she mechanically added row after row to the blue worsted stocking, she reflected. From Madelon's few distracted words, she imagined that she knew the state of the case very well; it was one not unprecedented, and presented no difficulties to either comprehension or belief. "They wanted to bring her up as a nun, and so she ran away. Well, thou hast done wisely, little one; I also know something of convents and nuns, and if it depends on me to protect thee,

they shall not touch thee, *mon enfant.*" This was her final resolution as she sat knitting and reflecting, with a great sympathy with, and tenderness for, the poor little terrified, hunted girl, lying there at her mercy.

Such tenderness, and power of sympathy with distress, were indeed amongst Jeanne-Marie's strongest characteristics, hidden though they were under a harsh, imperious manner and exterior. For she too had had a strange, sad, troublous life, with tragedy and sorrow enough in it, which it does not concern us to relate here, and which were yet of no small concern to our little Madelon, as she lay there, dependant on this one woman for freedom, shelter, and even existence. For if, as is surely the case, in our life of to-day lies a whole prophecy of our life in the future, if in our most trivial actions is hidden the germ of our greatest

deeds, then our most momentous decision in some sudden emergency, is but the sure consummation and fruition of each unnoticed detail, our action of to-day but the inevitable result of a whole previous lifetime of preparation for some unforeseen crisis. So too, from a present habit of thought, much may be surmised as to what has been done and suffered in the past; and though little was known about Jeanne-Marie, some inferences might have been drawn concerning her former life, had any of her neighbours been skilled in the inductive method, or been sufficiently interested in the woman to study her character closely. But in fact they cared very little about her. It is true that when she had first come into the village, there had been many conjectures about her, set afloat. She did not belong to that part of the country, she could not even speak the Liége *patois*,

and never took the trouble to learn it, invariably using the French language. She had no belongings, and never spoke of her former life; so that it was not long before a vague, open-mouthed curiosity, seizing upon a thousand untested hints and rumours to satisfy itself withal, led the villagers to whisper among themselves that some strange history was attached to her; and woe to that woman who, in a small village, is accredited with a strange history that no one knows anything about! But Jeanne-Marie had outlived all this; her secrets, if she had any, were never revealed either then or later, and in time people had ceased to trouble themselves about her. She led a silent, solitary life, resenting perhaps the suspicion with which she had at first been received, and holding aloof from her neighbours as they held aloof from her. Her restaurant was well attended, for she gave

the best wine in the village, was liberal, and of an honesty above suspicion; but even the men who were her most constant customers did not like her, and were half afraid of her. She held imperious rule among them, issuing imperative commands which she expected to be obeyed, and enforcing strict order and regularity in her house. To the women of the village her manners were cold, abrupt, and reserved; she never stopped to gossip or chatter; she would come and go about her business without an unnecessary word, and the women, looking after her, had ceased to do more than shrug their shoulders, and resume the flow of talk her silent presence had checked.

But it was, after all, only the gay, and prosperous, and happy that she shunned. The poor, the friendless, the erring, the rejected of this world, were certain to find in Jeanne-Marie a friend who never

failed, one who looked out for the sorrowful and broken-hearted, and never passed by on the other side. Even the village children knew to whom to run when hurt, or unhappy, or in disgrace, sure of getting consolation and sugarplums from the sad, lonely woman, though equally sure of being sent away as soon as their tears were dried, and their troubles forgotten. If the poor, abused Ugly Duckling of Hans Andersen's tale had strayed on a wintry day to her door, she would have taken it in, and nourished, and cherished it all through the cold, dark weather; but when the summer was come, and the duckling grown into a swan, spread its broad white wings against the blue sky, she would have watched it fly away without word or sign to detain it; she would have had nothing in common with it then.

So to Jeanne-Marie it seemed the simplest

thing in the world, that, having found Madelon in need of help, she should help her at the cost of any trouble to herself; that she should take in, and cherish this poor little stray girl without inquiry, without hope, or thought of reward. At Madelon, happy, successful, contented, Jeanne-Marie would not have looked a second time; but for Madelon, forsaken, shelterless, dependent on her, she would have been ready almost to lay down her life.

In about half an hour, Jacques Monnier returned with the doctor. He knew Jeanne-Marie well, as he knew everyone in the village, and went at once upstairs to the little bedroom where Madelon was lying.

"Your niece, I think Jacques Monnier told me?" he said, after watching Madelon for a minute as she lay in her uneasy sleep.

"Yes," said Jeanne-Marie with a certain sullenness of manner, which she was apt to

display towards her superiors in station.

"Has she been here long?" said the doctor, feeling Madelon's pulse, but looking steadily at the woman; "when was she taken ill? How is it you have not called me in before?"

"Look here, Monsieur le Docteur," answered Jeanne-Marie with a sort of stolid defiance, "I called you in to tell me what to do for the child, not to put me through a catechism. She fainted away this morning, and when she came to herself again, she began to rave and talk nonsense, so I sent for you. Now tell me what is to be done."

Just then Madelon opened her eyes.

"Do you not know me, Madame?" she said. "I am Madeleine Linders, and papa is dead; he sent me to be with Aunt Thérèse, but she is dead too—Oh, save me, save me!" she cried, springing up with all the old terror upon her; "don't let them

take me, papa, you made me promise that I would not stay there. Tell Aunt Thérèse to go away, papa; papa, save me!" and she clung to the doctor's arm. "Besides, you know," she went on, speaking fast and eagerly, "I promised him—Monsieur Horace, you know—and I must keep it, I must keep my promise to Monsieur Horace,—I must, I must!"

"You hear?" said Jeanne-Marie, as Madelon fell back on the pillow again, muttering to herself.

"I hear," answered the doctor, "and I see that she is in a high fever, and it may go hard with her, poor child! It is fortunate she is with you, Jeanne-Marie," he went on, kindly, "for you are a capital nurse, I know; but I am afraid it will be a long business."

"That is no matter," she answered.

"If you would like to have her removed

to the hospital at Liége," continued the doctor, doubtfully, "it might still be done. It may injure your business to have her here. Still, as you say she is your niece——"

"As I say she is my niece," returned Jeanne-Marie, abruptly, "it is not likely I should turn her out of the house, and that is enough. My business will take care of itself. And now tell me what I am to do, doctor?"

He prescribed for Madelon, said he would call again, and left the house, pondering on the woman who kept so apart from her neighbours, and on her small visitor, who he knew well enough was not her niece, for had not Jacques Monnier told him how Jeanne-Marie had suddenly come in out of the rain, carrying the girl in her arms, and had taken her upstairs without a word of explanation?

"There is a mystery somewhere," thought

the doctor; "but it is no concern of mine." And so he went his way to visit his next patient.

Jeanne-Marie had no fears concerning the doctor's discretion; he was a man too busy in his scattered district to have much time or inclination for gossip. But she had far less confidence in Jacques Monnier's wisdom, and thought it not inexpedient to go downstairs, after the doctor's departure, and give her customer a word of exhortation. He was seated at the table as before, twirling the glass in his fingers, and gazing vacantly out of window.

"Well, Jacques," said Jeanne-Marie, "and what did you tell the doctor?"

"I told him what you told me," said the man, in a surly voice.

"What was that?"

"That your niece was ill, and that he was to come and see her."

"Was that all?"

No answer.

"Was that all?" repeated Jeanne-Marie. "*Allons*, Jacques, don't keep me waiting. I will know what you said to the doctor."

Jacques, who under other circumstances might have met this imperative mode of questioning by dogged silence, or an evasive answer, was too uncertain as to what the doctor himself might have repeated to Jeanne-Marie, to attempt equivocation.

"I told him," he said, slowly and reluctantly, "that it was a queer thing you should have picked up your niece in the street, and that I didn't believe she was your niece at all; and no more I do, Jeanne-Marie," he added, gaining courage as he spoke.

"Ah! you told him that?" said the woman. "Well, look you, Jacques, if I find you saying any such thing again, this is

the very last time you cross my door-step, and that account of yours will have to be paid in full next week. You understand?"

"Oh! yes, I understand well enough," he answered sulkily; "but if I hold my tongue the neighbours will talk; I am not the only person who saw you come through the street, I will answer for it."

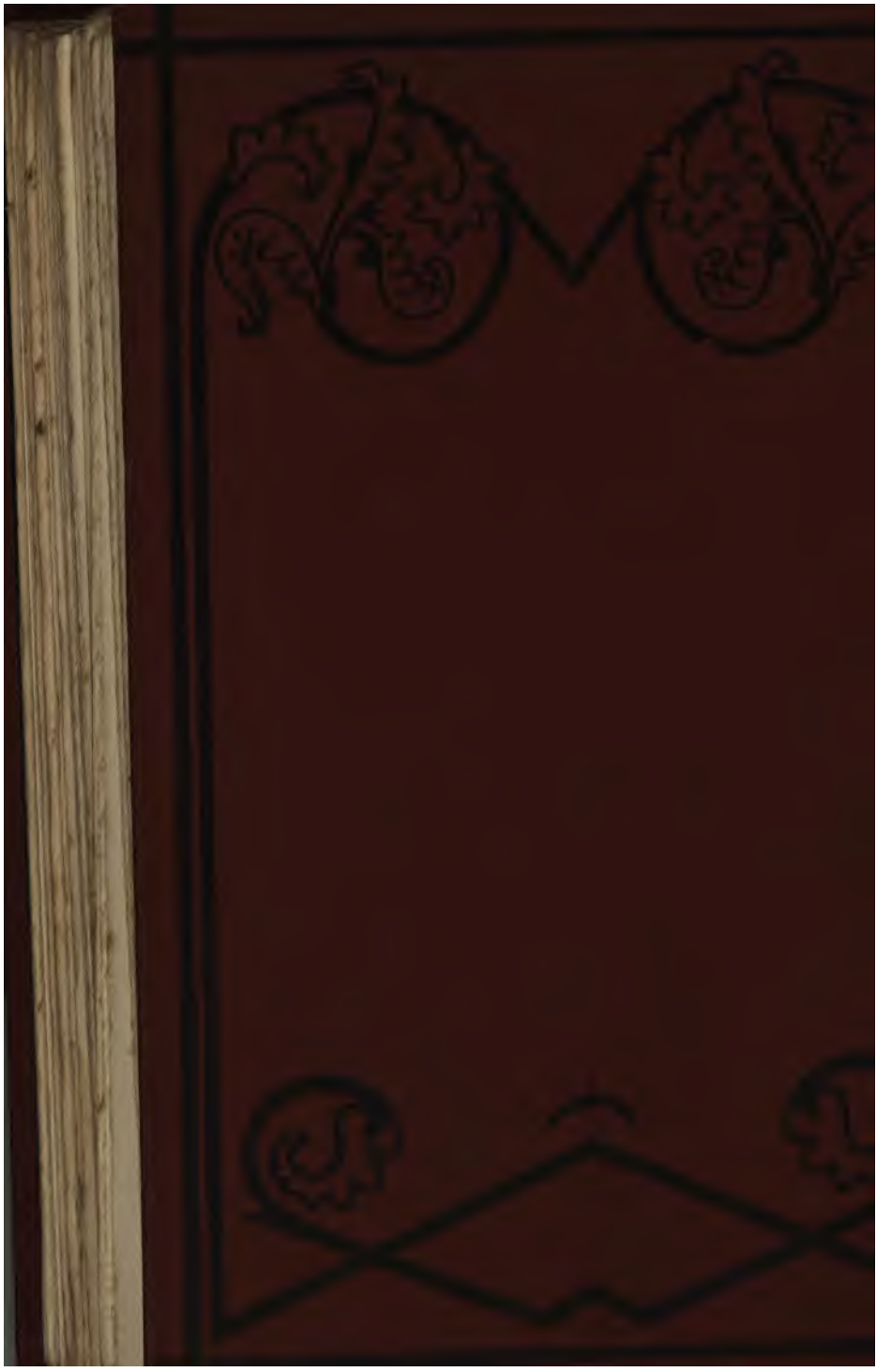
"Who said I came through the village at all? And what does it matter to you what the neighbours say?" retorted Jeanne-Marie, "attend to what I say—that is enough for you, Jacques—and if you do hear anyone say anything about the child upstairs, tell them it is my niece come on a visit, and not a word more; otherwise you understand——"

"Oh! yes, I understand," he repeated grumbling, "but what do I care? Yours is not the only wine to be had in Le Trooz——"

"Bah!" was Jeanne-Marie's only answer, as she left the room. She knew her customer too well to be in the least afraid of his carrying his implied threat into execution. Indeed, Jacques Monnier, who had no mind to be ousted from the convenient little restaurant, where he got good wine and long credit, acted upon the hints he had received, and stuck manfully to Jeanne-Marie's version of her adventure. And so it happened, that although for a day or two a few rumours were afloat in the village, they soon died away; and it was received as an established fact by those who cared to interest themselves in Jeanne-Marie's affairs, that it was her niece whom the doctor went to see so regularly. And so much apart did Jeanne-Marie keep from her neighbours, that the subject was soon half-forgotten, and Madelon's very existence seemed problematic, as she lay in the little

upstairs room, and the woman who sheltered her, appeared to come and go about her business much the same as usual.

As for Jeanne-Marie, as soon as the house was quiet, on the evening of that day so eventful for our little Madelon, she sat down and wrote two letters: one she put into a large envelope, which she directed to a street in Paris; the other, inclosed in this first, was addressed to the Superior of the Convent at Liége, and the letters, with their Paris direction, were put into the post that very night.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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